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TWO ON A TOWER.

By THOMAS HARDY,

Author of "A Pair of Blue Eyes." "Under the Greenwood Tree," "Far from the Madding Crowd," etc., etc.

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TWO ON A TOWER.

By THOMAS HARDY.

CHAPTER I.

ON an early winter afternoon, clear but not cold, when the vegetable world was a weird multitude of skeletons through whose ribs the sun shone freely, a gleaming landau came to a pause on the crest of a hill in Wessex. The spot was where the old Melchester road, which the carriage had hitherto followed, was joined by a drive that led round into a park at no great distance off. The footman alighted, and went to the occupant of the carriage, a lady of about six and twenty. She was looking through the opening afforded by a fieldgate at the undulating stretch of country beyond. In pursuance of some remark from her, the servant looked in the same direction.

The central feature of the middle distance, as they beheld it, was a circular isolated hill, of no great elevation, which placed itself in strong chromatic contrast with a wide acreage of surrounding arable by being covered with fir trees. The trees were all of one size and age, so that their tips assumed the precise curve of the hill they grew upon. This pine-clad protuberance was yet further marked out from the general landscape

by having on its summit a tower in the form of a classical column, which, though partly immersed in the plantation, rose above the tree-tops to a considerable hight. Upon this object the eyes of lady and servant were bent.

"Then there is no road leading near it?" she asked.

"Nothing nearer than where we are now, my lady."

"Oh! Then drive home." And the carriage rolled on its way.

A few days later, the same lady, in the same carriage, passed that spot again. Her eyes, as before, turned to the distant tower.

"Nobbs," she said, "could you find your way home through that field, so as to get near the outskirts of the plantation?"

The coachman regarded the field. "Well, my lady," he observed, "in dry weather we might drive in there, and so get across by Five-and-Twenty Acres, all being well. But the valler ground is so heavy after these rains that—perhaps it would hardly be safe to try it now."

"Perhaps not," she assented, indifferently. "Remember it, will you, at a drier time." And again the carriage sped along the road, the lady's eyes resting on the segmental hill, the blue trees that muffled it, and the column that formed its apex, till they were out of sight.

A long time elapsed before that lady drove over the hill again. It was February; the soil was now unquestionably dry, the weather and scene being in other respects much as they had been before. The familiar shape of the column seemed to remind her that at last an opportunity for a close inspection had arrived. Giving her directions, she saw the gate opened, and after a little manœuvring the carriage swayed slowly into the uneven field. Although the pillar stood upon the hereditary estate of her husband, the lady had never visited it, owing to its insulation by this well-nigh impracticable ground. The drive to the base of the hill was tedious and jerky, and on reaching it she alighted, directing that the carriage

should be driven back empty over the clods, to wait for her on the nearest edge of the field. She then ascended beneath the trees on foot.

The column now showed itself as a much more important erection than it had appeared from the road, or the park, or the windows of Welland House, her residence hard by, whence she had surveyed it hundreds of times without ever feeling a sufficient interest in its details to investigate them. The column had been erected in the last century, as a substantial memorial of her husband's great-grandfather, a respectable officer who had fallen in the American war, and the reason of her lack of interest was partly owing to her relations with this husband, of which more anon. It was little more than the sheer desire for something to do—the chronic desire of her curiously lonely life —that had brought her here now. She was in a mood to welcome anything that would in some measure disperse an almost killing *ennui.* She would have welcomed even a misfortune. She had heard that from the summit of the pillar three counties could be seen. Whatever pleasurable effect was to be derived from looking into three counties at the same time she would enjoy to-day.

The fir-shrouded hill-top turned out to be an old Roman camp,—if it were not an old British castle, or an old Saxon field of Witenagemote,—with remains of an outer and an inner vallum, a winding path leading up between their overlapping ends by an easy ascent. The spikelet from the trees formed a soft carpet over the route, and occasionally a brake of brambles barred the interspaces of the trunks. Soon she stood immediately at the foot of the column.

It had been built in the Tuscan order of architecture, and was really a tower, being hollow, with steps inside. The gloom and solitude which prevailed round the base were remarkable. The sob of the environing trees was here expressively manifest, and as, in the light breeze, their thin, straight stems rocked in seconds, like inverted pendulums, some boughs and twigs rubbed the pillar's sides, or occasionally clicked in

catching each other. Below the level of their summits the masonry was lichen-stained and mildewed, for the sun never pierced that moaning cloud of blue-black vegetation; yards of moss grew in the joints of the stone-work, and here and there shade-loving insects had engraved on the mortar patterns of no human style or meaning, but curious and suggestive. Above the trees the case was different: the pillar rose into the sky a bright and cheerful thing, unimpeded, clean, and flushed with the sunlight.

The spot was seldom visited by a pedestrian, except perhaps in the shooting season. The rarity of human intrusion was evidenced by the mazes of rabbit-runs, the feathers of shy birds, the exuviæ of reptiles; as also by the fresh and uninterrupted paths of squirrels down the sides of trunks, and thence horizontally away.

The circumstance of the plantation being an island in the midst of an arable plain sufficiently accounted for this lack of visitors. Few unaccustomed to such places can be aware of the insulating effect of plowed ground, when no necessity compels people to traverse it. This rotund hill of trees and brambles, standing in the centre of a plowed field of some ninety or a hundred acres, was probably visited less frequently than a rock would have been visited in a lake of equal size.

She walked round the column to the other side, where she found the door through which the interior was reached. The paint, if it had ever had any, was all washed from its face, and down the decaying surface of the boards liquid rust from the nails and hinges had run in red stains. Over the door was a stone tablet, bearing, apparently, letters or words; but the inscription, whatever it was, had been smoothed over with a plaster of lichen.

Here stood this aspiring piece of masonry, erected as the most conspicuous and ineffaceable reminder of a man that could be thought of; and yet the whole aspect of the memorial betokened forgetfulness. Probably not a dozen people within the district knew the

name of the person commemorated, while perhaps not a soul remembered whether the column was hollow or solid, whether with or without a tablet and a door. She herself had lived within a mile of it for the last five years, and had never come near it till now.

She had no intention of ascending, but finding that the door was not fastened she pushed it open with her foot, and entered. A scrap of writing paper lay within, and arrested her attention by its freshness. Some human being, then, knew the spot, despite her surmises. But as the paper had nothing on it, no clew was afforded ; yet, feeling herself the proprietor of the column and all around it, her self-assertiveness was sufficient to lead her on. The staircase was lighted by slits in the wall, and there was no difficulty in reaching the top, the steps being quite unworn. The trap door giving on to the roof was open, and on looking through it an interesting spectacle met her eye.

A youth was sitting on a stool in the center of the lead flat which formed the summit of the column, his eye being applied to the end a large telescope that stood before him on a tripod. This sort of presence was unexpected, and the lady started back into the shade of the opening. The only effect produced upon him by her footfall was an impatient wave of the hand, without removing his eye from the instrument, as if to forbid her or anybody interrupting him.

Pausing where she stood, the lady examined the aspect of the individual who thus made himself so completely at home on a building which she deemed her unquestioned property. He was a youth who might properly have been characterized by a word which the judicious chronicler would not readily use in such a connection, preferring to reserve it for raising images of the opposite sex. Whether because no deep felicity is likely to arise from the circumstance, or from any other reason, to say in these days that a youth is beautiful is not to award him that amount of credit which the expression would have carried with it if he had lived in the times of the Classical Dictionary. So much, indeed, is the reverse the case that the as-

sertion creates an awkwardness in saying anything more about him. The beautiful youth usually verges so perilously on the incipient coxcomb, who is about to become the Lothario or Juan among the neighboring maidens, that, for the due understanding of our present young man, his sublime innocence of any thought concerning his own material aspect, or that of others, is more fervently asserted, and must be as fervently believed.

Such as he was, there the lad stood. The sun shone full in his face, and his hat was pushed aside for convenience, disclosing a curly head of very light, shining hair, which accorded well with the flush upon his cheek. He had such a complexion as that with which Raphael enriches the countenance of the youthful son of Zacharias,—a complexion which, though clear, is far enough removed from virgin delicacy, and suggests plenty of sun and wind as its accompaniment. His features were sufficiently straight in the contours to correct the beholder's first impression that the head was the head of a girl. Beside him stood a little oak table, and in front was the telescope.

His visitor had ample time to make these observations; and she may have done so all the more keenly through being herself of a totally opposite type. Her hair was black as midnight, her eyes had no less deep a shade, and her complexion showed the richness demanded as a support to these decided features. As she continued to look at the pretty fellow before her, apparently so far abstracted into some speculative world as scarcely to need a real one, a warmer wave of her warm temperament glowed visibly through her, and a qualified observer might from this have hazarded a guess that there was Southern blood in her veins.

But even the interest attaching to the youth could not arrest her attention forever, and as he made no further signs of moving his eye from the instrument, she broke the silence with: "What do you see?—something happening somewhere?"

"Yes, quite a catastrophe," he automatically murmered, without moving round.

"What?"

"A cyclone in the sun."

The lady paused, as if to consider the doubtful weight of that event in the scale of terrene life. "Will it make any difference to us, here?" she asked.

The young man by this time seemed to be awakened to the consciousness that somebody unusual was talking to him, and he turned.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I thought it was my relative come to look after me. She often comes about this time."

He continued to look at her and forget the sun, just such a reciprocity of influence as might have been expected between a dark lady and a flaxen-haired youth making itself apparent in the faces of each.

"Don't let me interrupt your observations," said she.

"Ah, no," said he, again applying his eye; whereupon his face lost the animation which her presence had lent it, and became immutable as a bust, though superadding to the serenity of repose the sensitiveness of life. The expression that settled on him was one of awe. Not unaptly might it have been said that he was worshiping the sun. Among the various intensities of that worship which have prevailed since the first intelligent being saw the luminary decline westward, as the young man now beheld it doing, his was not the weakest. He was engaged in what may be called a very chastened or schooled form of that first and most natural of adorations.

"But would you like to see it?" he recommenced. "It is an event that is witnessed only about once in two years, though it may occur often enough."

She assented, and looked, and saw a whirling mass, in the centre of which the fiery globe seemed to be laid bare to its core. It was a peep into a maelstrom of fire, taking place where nobody had ever been or ever would be.

"It is the strangest thing I ever beheld," she said. Then he looked again: and, wondering who her companion could be, she asked: "Are you often here?"

"Every night when it is not cloudy, and often in the day."

"Ah, night, of course. The heavens must be beautiful from this point."

"They are rather more than that."

"Indeed! Have you entirely taken possession of this column?"

"Entirely."

"But it is my column," she said, with smiling asperity.

"Then you are Lady Constantine, wife of the absent Sir Blount Constantine?"

"I am Lady Constantine."

"Ah, then I agree that it is yours. But will you allow me to rent it of you for a time, Lady Constantine?"

"You have taken it, whether I allow it or not. However, in the interests of science it is advisable that you continue your tenancy. Nobody knows you are here, I suppose?"

"Hardly anybody."

He then took her down a few steps into the interior, and showed her some ingenious contrivances for stowing articles away. "Nobody ever comes near the column—or, as it's called here, Rings-Hill Speer," he continued; "and when I first came up it nobody had been here for thirty or forty years. The staircase was choked with daws' nests and feathers, but I cleared them out."

"I understood the column was always kept locked?"

"Yes, it has been so. When it was built, in 1782, the key was given to my great grandfather, to keep by him in case visitors should happen to want it. He lived just down there where I live now." He denoted by a nod a little dell lying immediately beyond the plowed land which environed them. "He kept it in his bureau, and as the bureau descended to my grandfather, my mother, and myself, the key descended with it. After the first thirty or forty years, nobody ever asked for it. One day I saw it, lying rusty in its niche, and, finding that it belonged to this column, I took it

and came up. I stayed here till it was dark, and the stars came out, and that night I resolved to be an astronomer. I came back here from school three months ago, and I mean to be an astronomer still." He lowered his voice. "I aim at nothing less than the dignity and office of ASTRONOMER ROYAL, if I live. Perhaps I shall not live."

"I don't see why you should suppose that. How long are you going to make this your observatory?"

"About a year—till I have obtained a practical familiarity with the heavens. Ah, if I only had a good equatorial!"

"What is that?"

"A proper instrument for my pursuit. But time is short, and science is infinite—how infinite only those who study astronomy fully realize—and perhaps I shall be worn out before I make my mark."

She seemed to be greatly struck with the odd mixture in him of scientific earnestness and melancholy mistrust of all things human. Perhaps it was owing to the nature of his studies. "You are often on this tower alone at night?" she said.

"Yes; at this time of the year particularly, and while there is no moon. I observe from seven or eight till about two in the morning, with a view to my great work on variable stars. But with such a telescope as this—well, I must put up with it!"

"Can you see Saturn's ring and Jupiter's moons?"

He said dryly that he could manage to do that, not without some contempt for the state of her knowledge.

"I have never seen any planet or star through a telescope."

"If you will come the first clear night, Lady Constantine, I will show you any number of them. I mean, at your express wish; not otherwise.

"I should like to come, and possibly may at some time. These stars that vary so much—sometimes evening stars, sometimes morning stars, sometimes in the east, and sometimes in the west—have always interested me."

"Ah—now there is a reason for your not coming. Your ignorance of the realities of astronomy is so satisfactory that I will not disturb it except at your serious request."

"But I wish to be enlightened."

"Let me caution you against it."

"Is enlightenment on the subject, then, so terrible?"

"Yes, indeed."

She laughingly declared that nothing could have so piqued her curiosity as his statement, and turned to descend. He helped her down the stairs and through the briers. He would have gone further, and crossed the open corn-land with her, but she preferred to go alone. He then retraced his way to the top of the column, but, instead of looking longer at the sun, watched her diminishing towards the distant fence, behind which waited the carriage. When in the midst of the field, a dark spot on an area of brown, there crossed her path a moving figure, whom it was as difficult to distinguish from the earth he trod as the caterpillar from its leaf, by reason of the excellent match between his clothes and the clods. He was one of a dying-out generation who retained the principle, nearly unlearnt now, that a man's habiliments should be in harmony with his environment. Lady Constantine and this figure halted beside each other for some minutes; then they went on their several ways.

The brown person was a laboring man known to the world of Welland as Haymoss (the "worn" form of the word Amos, to adopt the phrase of the philologists). The reason of the halt had been the following dialogue:

Lady Constantine: "Who is that? Amos Fry, I think."

Haymoss: "Yes, my lady; a homely barley driller, born under the very eavesdroppings of your ladyship's smallest out-buildings, in a manner of speaking,—though your ladyship was neither born nor 'tempted at that time."

Lady C.: "Who lives in the old house behind the plantation?"

H.: "Old Gammer Martin, my lady, and her grandson."

Lady C.: "He has neither father nor mother, then?"

H.: "Not a single one, my lady."

Lady C.: "Where was he educated?"

H.: "At Warborne,—a place where they draw up young gam'sters' brains like rhubarb under a ninepenny pan, my lady, excusing my common way. They hit so much larning into en that 'a could talk like the day of Pentecost; which is a wonderful thing for a simple boy, and his mother only the plainest ciphering woman in the world. Warborne Grammar School—that's where 't was 'a went to. His father, the reverent Pa'son St. Cleeve, made a terrible bruckle hit in 's marrying, in the sight of the high. He were the curate here, my lady, for a length o' time."

Lady C.: "Oh, curate. It was before I knew the village."

H.: "Ay, long and merry ago! And he married Farmer Martin's daughter,—Giles Martin, a limberish man, who used to go rather bad upon his lags, if you can mind. I knowed the man well enough; who should know en better! The maid was a poor windling thing, and, though a playward piece o' flesh when he married her, 'a socked and sighed, and went out like a snoff. Well, when Pa'son St. Cleeve married this homespun woman the toppermost folk wouldn't speak to his wife. Then he dropped a cuss or two, and said he'd no longer get his living by curing their twopenny souls o' such damn nonsense as that (excusing my common way), and he took to farming straightway, and then 'a dropped down dead in a nor'-west thunder-storm; it being said—hee-hee!—that Master God was in tantrums wi' en for leaving his service,—hee-hee! I give the story as I heard it, my lady, but be dazed if I believe in such trumpery behavior of the fokes in the sky, nor anything else that's said about 'em. Well, Swithin, the boy, was sent to

the grammar school, as I say for; but what with having two stations of life in his blood, he's good for nothing, my lady. He mopes about,—sometimes here, and sometimes there; nobody troubles about en."

Lady Constantine thanked her informant, and proceeded onward. To her, as a woman, the most curious feature in the afternoon's incident was that this lad, of striking beauty, scientific attainments, and cultured bearing, should be linked, on the maternal side, with a local agricultural family through his father's matrimonial eccentricity. A more attractive feature in the case was that the same youth, so capable of being ruined by flattery, blandishment, pleasure, even gross prosperity, should be at present living on in a primitive Eden of unconsciousness, with aims towards whose accomplishment a Caliban shape would have been as effective as his own.

CHAPTER II.

SWITHIN ST. CLEEVE lingered on at his post, until the more sanguine birds of the plantation, already recovering from their midwinter consternation, piped a short evening hymn to the vanishing sun. The landscape was gently concave, with the exception of tower and hill, there were no points on which late rays might linger; and hence the dish-shaped ninety acres of tilled land assumed a uniform hue of shade quite suddenly. The one or two stars that appeared were quickly clouded over, and it was soon obvious that there would be no sweeping the heavens that night. After tying a piece of tarpaulin, which had once seen service on his maternal grandfather's farm, over all the apparatus around him, he went down the stairs in the dark, and locked the door. With the key in his pocket, he descended through the underwood on the side of the slope opposite to that trodden by Lady Constantine, and crossed the field in a line

mathematically straight, and in a manner that left no traces, by keeping in the same furrow all the way on tip-toe. In a few minutes he reached a little dell, which occurred quite unexpectedly on the other side of the field-fence, and descended to a venerable thatched house, whose enormous roof, broken up by dormers as big as hay-cocks, could be seen even in the twilight. Over the white walls, built of chalk in the lump, outlines of creepers formed dark patterns as if drawn in charcoal.

Inside the house his maternal grandmother was sitting by a wood fire. Before it stood a pipkin, in which something was evidently kept warm. An eight-legged oak table in the middle of the room was laid for a meal. This woman of eighty-three, in a large mob cap, under which she wore a little cap to keep the other clean, retained faculties but little blunted. She sat looking into the fire, with her hands upon her knees, quietly re-enacting in her brain certain of the long chain of episodes, pathetic, tragical, and humorous, which had constituted the parish history for the last sixty years. On Swithin's entry she looked up at him in a sideway direction.

"You should not have waited for me, granny," he said.

"'Tis of no account, my child. I've had a nap while sitting here. Yes, I've had a nap, and was up in my old country again, as usual. The place was as natural as when I left it,—e'en just threescore years ago. All the folks and my old aunt were there, as when I was a child,—'and when I awoke, behold it was a dream!' I suppose if I were really to set out and go there, hardly a soul would be left alive to say to me dog how art! But tell Hannah to stir her stumps and serve supper,—though I'd fain do it myself, the poor old soul is getting so unhandy!"

Hannah revealed herself to be much nimbler and several years younger than granny, though of this the latter seemed to be oblivious. When the meal was nearly over Mrs. Martin produced the contents of the mysterious vessel by the fire, saying that she had

caused it to be brought in from the back kitchen, because Hannah was hardly to be trusted with such things, she was becoming so childish.

"What is it, then?" said Swithin. "Oh, one of your special puddings." At sight of it, however, he added reproachfully: "Now, granny!"

Instead of being round it was in shape an irregular boulder that had been exposed to the weather for centuries,—a little scrap pared off here, and a little piece broken away there; the general aim being, nevertheless, to avoid destroying the symmetry of the pudding, while taking as much as possible of its substance.

"The fact is," added Swithin, "the pudding is half gone!"

"I've only sliced off the merest paring once or twice, to taste if it was well done!" pleaded granny Martin, with wounded feelings. "I said to Hannah, when she took it up, 'Put it here to keep it warm, as there's a better fire than in the back kitchen.'"

"Well, I am not going to eat any of it!" said Swithin, decisively, as he rose from the table, pushed away his chair, and went up-stairs; the other station of life that was in his blood, and had been brought out by the grammar school, probably stimulating him.

"Ah, the world is an ungrateful city! 'T was a pity I didn't go under ground and disappear from history sixty years ago, instead of leaving my own country to come here!" mourned old Mrs. Martin. "But I told his mother how 'twould be,—marrying so many notches above her. The child was sure to chaw high, like his father."

When Swithin had been up-stairs a minute or two, however, he altered his mind, and, coming down again, ate all the pudding, with the aspect of a person engaged in a deed of great magnanimity. The relish with which he did so restored the unison that knew no more serious interruptions than such as this.

"Mr. Torkingham has been here this afternoon," said his grandmother; "and he wants me to let him meet some of the choir here to-night for practice.

They who live at this end of the parish won't go to his house to try over the tunes, because 'tis so far, they say; and so 'tis, poor men. So he's going to see what coming to them will do. He asks if you would like to join."

"I would if I had not so much to do."

"But it is cloudy to-night."

"Yes; but I have calculations without end, granny. Now, don't you tell him I'm in the house, will you, and then he'll not ask for me."

"But if he should, must I then tell a lie, Lord forgive me?"

"No, you can say I'm up-stairs; he must think what he likes. Not a word about the astronomy to any of them, whatever you do. I should be called a visionary and all sorts."

"So thou beest, child. Why can't ye do something that's of use——"

At the sound of footsteps Swithin beat a hasty retreat up-stairs, where he struck a light, and revealed a table covered with books and papers, while round the walls hung star-maps and other diagrams illustrative of celestial phenomena. In a corner stood a huge pasteboard tube, which a close inspection would have shown to be intended for a telescope. Swithin hung a thick cloth over the window, in addition to the curtains, and sat down to his papers. On the ceiling was a black stain of smoke, and under this he placed his lamp, evidencing that the midnight oil was consumed on that precise spot pretty often.

Meanwhile, there had entered to the room below a personage who, to judge from her voice and the quick pit-pat of her feet, was a female, young and blithe. Mrs. Martin welcomed her by the title of Miss Tabitha Lark, and inquired what wind brought her that way; to which the visitor replied that she had come for the singing.

"Oh, you are one of them? Sit ye down. And do you still go to the house to read to my lady?"

"Yes, I go and read; but as to getting my lady to hearken, that's more than a team of six horses could

force her to do." The girl had a remarkably smart and fluent utterance, which was probably a cause, or a consequence, of her vocation.

"'Tis the same story, then?" said grandmother Martin.

"Yes. Eaten out with listlessness. She's neither sick nor sorry, but how dull and dreary she is only herself can tell. When I get there in the morning, there she is sitting up in bed, for my lady don't care to get up; and then she makes me bring this book and that book, till the bed is heaped up with immense volumes, that half bury her, making her look, as she leans upon her elbow, like the stoning of Stephen in the church window. She yawns; then she looks toward the tall glass; then she looks out at the weather, mooning her great black eyes, and fixing them on the sky as if they stuck there, while my tongue goes flick-flack along, a hundred and fifty words a minute; then she looks at the clock; then she asks me what I've been reading."

"Ah, poor soul!" said granny. "No doubt she says in the morning: 'Would God it were evening,' and in the evening, 'Would God it were morning,' like the disobedient woman in Deuteronomy."

Swithin, in the room overhead, had suspended his calculations, for the dialogue interested him. There now crunched heavier steps outside the door, and his grandmother could be heard greeting sundry representatives of the bass and tenor voice, who lent a cheerful and well-known personality to the names of Sammy Blore, Nat Chapman, Hezekiah Biles, and Haymoss Fry (the latter being the one with whom the reader has already a distant acquaintance); besides these came small producers of treble, who had not yet developed into such distinctive units of society as to require particularizing.

"Is the good man come?" asked Nat Chapman. "No, I see we are here afore him. And how is it with aged women to-night, Mrs. Martin?"

"Tedious traipsing enough with this one, Nat. Sit ye down. Well, little Freddy, you don't wish in the

morning that 'twere evening, and at evening that 'twere morning again, do you, Freddy, trust ye for it?"

"Now, who might wish such a thing as that, Mrs. Martin?—nobody in this parish?" asked Sammy Blore, curiously.

"My lady is always wishing it," spoke up Miss Tabitha Lark.

"Oh, she! Nobody can be answerable for the wishes of that onnatural class of mankind. Not but that the woman's heart-strings is tried in many aggravating ways."

"Ah, poor woman!" said granny. "The state she finds herself in—neither maid, wife, nor widow, as you may say—is not the primest form of life for keeping in good spirits. How long is it since she has heard from Sir Blount, Tabitha?"

"Two years and more," said the young woman. "He went into one side of Africa, as it might be, three St. Martin's days back. I can mind it, because 'twas my birthday. And he meant to come out the other side. But he didn't. He has never come out at all."

"For all the world like losing a rat in a barley-mow," said Hezekiah, glancing around for corroboration. "He's lost, though you know where he is." His comrades nodded. "Ay, my lady is a walking weariness, that's plain. I seed her yawn just at the very moment when the fox was halloaed away by Harton Copse, and the hounds ran him all but past her carriage wheels. If I were she, I'd see a little life; though there's no fair, club-walking, nor feast, to speak of, till Easter week—that's true."

"She dares not. She's under solemn oath and testament to do no such thing."

"Be cust if I would keep any such oath and testament! But here's the pa'son, if my ears don't deceive me."

There was a noise of horse's hoofs without, a tumbling against the door-scraper, a tethering to the window-shutter, a creaking of the door on its hinges, and a voice which Swithin recognized as Mr. Torkingham's. He greeted each of the previous arrivals by name, and

stated that he was glad to see them all so punctually assembled.

"Ay, sir," said Haymoss Fry. "'Tis only my jints that kept me from assembling myself long ago. I'd assemble upon the top of Welland Steeple, if 't wern't for my jints. I assure you, Pa'son Tarkengham, that in the clitch 'o my knees, where the rain used to come through when I was cutting clots for the new lawn, in my old lady's time, 'tis as if rats were gnawing, every now and then. When a feller's young he's too small in the brain to see how soon a constitution can be squandered, worse luck!"

"True," said Biles, to fill the time while the parson was engaged in finding the psalms. "A man's a fool till he's forty. Often have I thought, when hay-pitching, and the small of my back seeming no stouter than a hornet's, 'The Lord send that I had but the making of laboring men for a twelvemonth!' I'd gi'e every man jack two good backbones, even if the alteration was as wrong as forgery."

"Four—four backbones," said Haymoss, decisively.

"Yes, four," threw in Sammy Blore, with additional weight of experience. "For you want one in front for breast-plowing and such like, one on the right side for ground-dressing, and one at the left side for turning mixens."

"Well, four. Then next I'd move every man's wynd-pipe a good span away from his glutch-pipe, so that at harvest time he could fetch breath in 's drinking, without being choked and strangled as he is now. Thinks I, when I feel the victuals going——"

"Now we'll begin," interrupted Mr. Torkingham, his mind returning to this world again on concluding his search for a hymn.

Thereupon the racket of chair-legs on the floor signalled that they were settling into their seats—a disturbance which Swithin took advantage of by going on tiptoe across the floor above, and putting sheets of paper over knot-holes in the boarding at points where carpet was lacking, that his lamp-light might not shine down The absence of a ceiling beneath rendered his

position virtually that of one suspended in the same apartment.

The parson announced the tune, and his voice burst forth with "Onward, Christian soldiers!" in notes of rigid cheerfulness. In this start, however, he was joined only by the girls and boys, the men furnishing but an accompaniment of ahas and ahems. Mr. Torkingham stopped, and Sammy Blore spoke:

"Beg your pardon, sir—if you'll deal mild with us a moment. What with the wind and walking, my throat's rough as a garter; and not knowing you were going to hit up that minute, I hadn't hawked, and I don't think Hezzy and Nat had, either—had ye, souls?"

"I hadn't done it thoroughly, that's true," said Hezekiah.

"Quite right of you then to speak," said Mr. Torkingham. "Don't mind explaining; we are here for practice. Now clear your throats, then, and at it again."

There was a noise as of atmospheric hoes and scrapers, and the bass contingent at last got under way with a time of its own. "Honwerd, Christen sojers!"

"Ah, that's where we are so defective,—the pronunciation," interrupted the parson. "Now repeat after me: 'On-ward, Christ-ian, sol-diers.'"

The choir repeated like an exaggerative echo: "Onwed, Chris-ting, soljaws."

"Better!" said the parson, in the strenuously sanguine tones of a man who got his living by discovering a bright side in things where it was not very perceptible to other people. "But it should not be given with quite so extreme an accent; or we may be called affected by other parishes. And Nathaniel Chapman, there's a jauntiness in your manner of singing which is not quite becoming. Why don't you sing more earnestly?"

"My conscience won't let me, sir," said Nat. "They say every man for himself; but, thank God, I'm not so mean as to lessen old fokes' chances by singing earnest in the prime o' life."

"It 's bad reasoning, Nat, I fear. Now, perhaps we had better sol-fa the tune. Eyes on your books, please.

"*Sol-sol ! fa-fa ! mi* —"

"I can't sing like that, not I!" said Sammy Blore, with condemnatory astonishment. "I can sing genuine music, like F and G ; but not anything so much out of the order of nature as that."

"Perhaps you've brought the wrong book, sir?" chimed in Haymoss, kindly. "I've knowed music early in life, and late,—in short, ever since Luke Sneap broke his new fiddle-bow in the wedding psalm, when Pa'son Wilton brought home his bride (you can mind the time, Sammy?—at 'His wife, like a fair fertile vine, her lovely fruit shall bring,' when the young woman turned as red as a rose, not knowing 't was coming). I've knowed music ever since then, I say, sir, and never heard the like o' that. Every martel note had his name of A, B, C, at that time and since."

"Yes—yes, but this is a more recent system."

"Still, you can't alter a old-established note that's A or B by nater," rejoined Haymoss, with yet deeper conviction that Mr. Torkingham was getting off his head. "Now sound A, neighbor Sammy, and let's have a slap at Christen sojers again."

Sammy produced a private tuning-fork, black and grimy, which, being about seventy years of age, and wrought before pianoforte builders had sent up the pitch to make their instruments brilliant, was nearly a note flatter than the parson's. While an argument as to the true pitch was in progress, there came a knocking without.

"Somebody's at the door!" said a little treble girl.

"Thought I heard a knock before!" said the relieved choir.

The latch was lifted, and a man asked from the darkness: "Is Mr. Torkingham here?"

"Yes, Mills. What do you want?" It was the parson's man.

"Oh, if you please," says Mills, showing an advanced margin of himself round the door, "Lady Constantine wants to see you very particular, sir, and could you

call on her after dinner, if you be n't engaged with fokes ? She's just had a letter,—so they say,—and it's about that, I believe."

Finding, on looking at his watch, that it was necessary to start at once if he meant to see her that night, the parson cut short the practicing, and, naming another night for meeting, he withdrew. All the singers assisted him on to his cob, and watched him till he disappeared over the edge of the glen.

CHAPTER III.

MR. TORKINGHAM trotted briskly onward to his house, a distance of about a mile, each cottage, as it revealed its half-buried position by its single light, appearing like a one-eyed night creature watching him from an ambush. Leaving his horse at the parsonage, he performed the remainder of the journey on foot, crossing the park towards Welland House by a stile and path, till he struck into the drive near the north door of the mansion. This drive, it may be remarked, was also the common highway to the lower village, and hence Lady Constantine's residence and park, as is often the case with old-fashioned manors, possessed none of the exclusiveness often found in newer aristocratic settlements. The parishioners looked upon the park avenue as their natural thoroughfare, particularly for christenings, weddings, and funerals, which passed the squire's mansion with due considerations as to the scenic effect of the same from the manor windows. Hence the house of Constantine, when going out from its breakfast, had been continually crossed on the doorstep, for the last two hundred years, by the houses of Hodge and Giles in full cry for dinner. At present the collisions were but too infrequent, for though the villagers passed the north front door as regularly as ever, they seldom met a Constantine. Only one was there to be met, and she had no zest for outings before noon.

The long, low front of the Great House, as it was called by the parishioners, stretching from end to end of the terrace, was in darkness as the vicar slackened his pace before it, and only the distant fall of water disturbed the stillness of the manorial precincts.

On gaining admittance he found Lady Constantine waiting to receive him. She wore a heavy dress of velvet and lace, and, being the only person in the spacious apartment, she looked small and isolated. In her left hand she held a letter and a couple of at-home cards. The soft, dark eyes which she raised to him as he entered—large, and melancholy by circumstance far more than by quality—were the natural indices of a warm and affectionate, perhaps slightly voluptuous temperament, languishing for want of something to do, cherish, or suffer for.

Mr. Torkingham seated himself. His boots, which had seemed elegant in the farm-house, appeared rather clumsy here, and his coat, that was a model of tailoring when he stood amid the choir, now exhibited decidedly strained relations with his limbs. Three years had passed since his induction to the living of Welland, but he had never as yet found means to establish that relationship with Lady Constantine which usually grows up, in the course of time, between parsonage and manor-house,—unless, indeed, either side should surprise the other by showing a weakness for awkward modern ideas on land ownership or church formulas, respectively, which had not been the case here. The present meeting, however, seemed likely to initiate such a relationship.

There was an appearance of confidence on Lady Constantine's face ; she said she was so very glad tha he had come ; and, looking down at the letter in her hand, she was on the point of pulling it from its envelope, but she did not. After a moment she went on more quickly : "I wanted your advice, or rather your opinion, on a serious matter,—on a point of conscience." Saying which, she laid down the letter and looked at the cards.

It might have been apparent to a more penetrating

eye than the vicar's that Lady Constantine, either from timidity, misgiving, or reconviction, had swerved from her intended communication, or perhaps decided to begin at the other end.

The parson, who had been expecting a question on some local business or intelligence, at the tenor of her words altered his face to the higher banch of his profession.

"I hope I may find myself of service, on that or any other question," he said, gently.

"I hope so. You might possibly be aware, Mr. Torkingham, that my husband, Sir Blount Constantine, was, not to mince matters, a mistaken—somewhat jealous man. Yet you may hardly have discerned it in the short time you knew him."

"I had some little knowledge of Sir Blount's character in that respect."

"Well, on this account my married life with him was not of the most comfortable kind." (Lady Constantine's voice dropped to a more pathetic note.) "I am sure I gave him no cause for suspicion; though had I known his disposition sooner I should hardly have dared to marry him. But his jealousy and doubt of me were not so strong as to divert him from a purpose of his—a mania for African lion-hunting, which he dignified by calling it a scheme of geographical discovery; for he was inordinately anxious to make a name for himself in that field. It was the one passion that was stronger than his mistrust of me. Before going away he sat down with me in this room and read me a lecture, which resulted in a very bad offer on my part. When I tell it to you, you will find that it provides a key to all that is unusual in my life here. He bade me consider what my position would be when he was gone; hoped that I should remember what was due to him—that I would not behave towards other men so as to bring the name of Constantine into suspicion; and charged me to avoid levity of conduct in attending any ball, rout, or dinner to which I might be invited. I, in some indignation at his low opinion of me, responded perhaps too spiritedly. I volunteer

ed, there and then, to live like a cloistered nun during his absence; to go into no society whatever—not even to a neighbor's dinner party; and demanded bitterly if that would satisfy him. He said yes, instantly held me to my word, and gave me no loop-hole for retracting it. The inevitable fruits of the precipitancy have resulted to me; my life has become a burden. I get such invitations as these" (holding up the cards) "but I so invariably refuse them that they are getting very rare. . . .I ask you, Can I honestly break that promise to my husband?"

Mr. Torkingham seemed embarrassed. "If you promised Sir Blount Constantine to live in solitude till he comes back, you are, it seems to me, bound by that promise. I fear that the wish to be released from your engagement is to some extent a reason why it should be kept. But your own conscience would surely be the best guide, Lady Constantine!"

"My conscience is disordered with the sense of its responsibilities," she continued, with a sigh. "Yet it certainly does sometimes say to me that—that I ought to keep my word. Very well; I must go on as I am going, I suppose."

"If you respect a vow, I think you must respect your own," said the parson, acquiring some further firmness. "Had it been wrung from you by compulsion, moral or physical, it would have been open to you to break it. But as you proposed a vow when your husband only required a good intention, I think you ought to adhere to it; or what is the pride worth that led you to offer it?"

"Very well," she said, with resignation. "But it was quite a work of supererogation on my part."

"That you proposed it in a supererogatory spirit does not lessen you obligation, having once put yourself under that obligation. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, says: 'An oath for confirmation is an end of all strife.' And you will readily recall the words of Ecclesiastes: 'Pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.' Why not write

to Sir Blount, tell him the inconvenience of such a bond, and ask him to release you?"

"No; never will I. The expression of such a desire would, in his mind, be a sufficient reason for disallowing it. I'll keep my word."

Mr. Torkingham rose to leave. After she had held out her hand to him, when he had crossed the room, and was within two steps of the door, she said, "Mr. Torkingham." He stopped. "What I have told you is not what I sent for you to tell you."

Mr. Torkingham walked back to her side. "What is it then?" he asked, with grave surprise.

"It is a true revelation, as far as it goes; but there is something more. I have received this letter, and I wanted to say—something."

"Then say it now, my dear lady."

"No," she answered, with a look of distress. "I cannot speak of it now! Some other time. Don't stay. Please consider this conversation as private. Good night."

CHAPTER IV.

IT was a bright starlight night, a week or ten days later. There had been several such nights since the occasion of Lady Constantine's promise to Swithin St. Cleeve to come and study astronomical phenonema on the Rings-Hill column; but she had not gone there. This evening she sat at a window, the blind of which had not been drawn down. Her elbow rested on a little table, and her cheek on her hand. Her eyes were attracted by the brightness of the planet Jupiter, as he rode in the eliptic opposite, beaming down upon her as if desirous of notice.

Beneath the planet could be still discerned the dark edges of the park landscape against the sky. As one of its features, though nearly screened by the trees which had been planted to shut out the fallow tracts of the estate, rose the upper part of the column. It was hardly visible now, even if visible at all; yet

Lady Constantine knew from daytime experience its exact bearing from the window at which she leaned. The knowledge that there it still was, despite its rapid envelopement by the shades, led her lonely mind to her late meeting on its summit with the young astronomer, and to her promise to honor him with a visit for learning some secrets about the scintillating bodies overhead. The curious juxtaposition of youthful ardor and old despair that she had found in the lad would have made him interesting to a woman of perception, apart from his fair hair and early-Christian face. But such is the hightening touch of memory that his beauty was probably richer in her imagination than in the real. It was a moot point to consider whether the temptations that would be brought to bear upon him in his course would exceed the statute power of his nature to resist. Had he been a rich youth, he would have seemed one to tremble for. In spite of his attractive ambitions and gentlemanly bearing, she thought it would possibly be better for him if he never became known outside his lonely tower,—forgetting that he had received such intellectual enlargment as would make his continuance in Welland seem, in his own eye, a slight upon his father's branch of his family, the social standing of which had been, only a few years earlier, but little removed from her own.

Suddenly she flung her cloak about her and went out on the terrace. An altogether new idea plainly possessed her. She went down the steps to the lower lawn, through the door to the open park, and there stood still. The tower was discernible. As the words in which a thought is expressed develop a further thought, so *did* the fact of her having got so far, influence her to go farther

A person who had casually observed her gait would have thought it irregular; the lessenings and increasings of speed with which she proceeded in the direction of the pillar could be accounted for only by a motive much more disturbing than an intention to look through an astronomical telescope. Thus she went on, till, leaving the park, she crossed the turn-

pike road, and entered the large field, in the middle of which the fir-clad hill stood like Mont St. Michael in its bay.

The stars were so bright as distinctly to show her the place, and now she could see a faint light at the top of the column, which rose like a shadowy finger pointing to the upper constellations. There was no wind, in a human point of view; but a steady stertorous breathing from the fir-trees showed that, now as always, there was movement in apparent stagnation. Nothing but an absolute vacuum could paralyze their utterance.

The door of the tower was shut. It was something more than freakishness that is engendered by a sickening monotony which had led Lady Constantine thus far, and hence she made no ado about admitting herself. Three years ago, when her every action was a thing of propriety, she had known no possible purpose which could have led her abroad in a manner such as this.

She ascended the tower noiselessly. On raising her head above the hatchway she beheld Swithin bending over a scroll of paper which lay on the little table beside him. The small lantern that illuminated it showed also that he was warmly wrapped up in a coat and thick cap, behind him standing the telescope on its frame. What was he doing? She looked over his shoulder upon the paper, and saw figures and signs. When he jotted down something, he went to the telescope again.

"What are you doing to-night?" she said, in a low voice.

Swithin started, and turned. The faint lamp-light was sufficient to reveal her face to him.

"Tedious work, Lady Constantine," he answered, without betraying much surprise. "Doing my best to watch phenomenal stars, as I may call them."

"You said you would show me the heavens, if I could come on a starlight night. I have come."

Swithin, as a preliminary, swept round the telescope to Jupiter, and exhibited to her the glory of that orb.

Then he directed the instrument to the less bright shape of Saturn. "Here," he said, warming up to the subject, "we see a world which to my mind is by far the most wonderful in the solar system. Think of streams of satellites or meteors racing round and round the planet like a fly-wheel, so close together as to seem solid matter!" He entered further and further into the subject, his ideas gathering momentnm as he went on, like his pet heavenly bodies.

When this yellow-haired laddie paused for breath, she said, in tones very different from his own: "I ought now to tell you that, though I am interested in the stars, they were not what I came to see you about. They were only an excuse for coming. I first thought of disclosing the matter to Mr. Torkingham; but I altered my mind, and decided on you."

She spoke in so low a voice that he might not have heard her. At all events, abstracted by his grand theme, he did not heed her. He continued:—

"Well, we will get outside the solar system altogether—leave the whole group of sun, primary and secondary planets quite behind us in our flight, as a bird might leave its bush and sweep into the whole forest. Now what do you see, Lady Constantine?" He leveled the achromatic at Sirius.

She said she saw a bright star, though it only seemed a point of light now as before.

"That's because it is so distant that no magnifying will bring its size up to zero. Though called a fixed star, it is, like all fixed stars, moving with inconceivable velocity; but no magnifying will show that velocity as anything but rest.

And thus they talked on about Sirius, and then about other stars

> * * * in the scrowl
> Of all those beasts, and fish, and fowl,
> With which, like Indian plantations,
> The learned stock the constellations,

till he asked her how many stars she thought were visible to them at that moment.

She looked around over the magnificent stretch of sky that their high position unfolded. "Oh, thousands —hundreds of thousands," she said, absently.

"No. There are only about three thousand. Now, how many do you think are brought within sight by the help of a powerful telescope?"

"I won't guess."

"Twenty millions. So that, whatever the stars were made for, they were not made to please our eyes It is just the same in everything; nothing is made for man."

"Is it that notion which makes you so sad for your age?" she asked, with almost maternal solicitude. "I think astronomy is a bad study for you. It makes you feel human insignificance too plainly."

"Perhaps it does. However," he added, more cheerfully, "though I feel the study to be one almost tragic in its quality, I hope to be the new Copernicus. What he was to the solar system I aim to be to the systems beyond."

Then, by means of the instrument at hand, they traveled together from the earth to Uranus and the mysterious outskirts of the solar system; from the solar system to "61 Cygni," the nearest fixed star in the northern sky; from "61 Cygni" to remoter stars; thence to the remotest visible, till the ghastly chasm which they had bridged by a fragile line of sight was realized by Lady Constantine.

"We are now traversing distances beside which the immense line stretching from the earth to the sun is but an invisible point," said the youth. "When, just now, we had reached a planet whose remoteness is a hundred times the remoteness of the sun from the earth, we were only a two thousandth part of the journey to the spot at which we have optically aimed now."

"Oh, pray don't; it overpowers me!" she replied, not without seriousness. "It makes me feel that it is not worth while to live; it quite annihilates me."

"If it annihilates your ladyship to roam over these yawning spaces just once, think how it must annihi-

late me to be, as it were, in constant suspension amid them night after night."

"Yes. It was not really this subject that I came to see you upon, Mr. St. Cleeve," she began a second time. "It was a personal matter."

"I am listening, Lady Constantine."

"I will tell it you. Yet no—not this moment. Let us finish this grand subject first; it dwarfs mine." It would have been difficult to judge from her accents whether she were afraid to broach her own matter, or really interested in his. Or a certain youthful pride that he evidenced at being the elucidator of such a large theme, and at having drawn her there to hear and observe it, may have inclined her to indulge him for kindness' sake.

Thereupon he took exception to her use of the word "grand" as descriptive of the actual universe. "The imaginary picture of the sky as the concavity of a dome whose base extends from horizon to horizon of our earth is grand, simply grand, and I wish I had never got beyond looking at it in that way. But the actual sky is a horror."

"A new view of our old friends, the stars," she said, smiling up at them.

"But such an obviously true one? You would hardly think, at first, that horrid monsters lie up there," said the young man, "waiting to be discovered by any moderately penetrating mind—monsters to which those of the oceans bear no sort of comparison."

"What monsters may they be?"

"The monsters called Immensities. Until a person has thought out the stars and their interspaces, he has hardly learnt that there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape, namely, monsters of magnitude without known shape. Such monsters are the voids and waste places of the sky. Look, for instance, at those pieces of darkness in the Milky Way," he went on, pointing with his finger to where the galaxy stretched across over their heads with the luminousness of a frosted web. "You see that dark opening in it near the Swan? There is a still more remarkable

one south of the equator, called the Coal Sack, as a sort of nickname that has a farcical force from its very inadequacy. In these our sight plunges quite beyond any twinkler we have yet visited. Those are deep wells for the human mind to let itself down into, leave alone the human body! and think of the side caverns and secondary abysses to right and left as you pass on."

Lady Constantine was seriously impressed.

He tried to give her yet another idea of the size of the universe; never was there a more ardent endeavor to bring down the immeasurable to human comprehension! By figures of speech and apt comparisons he took her mind into leading-strings, compelling her to follow him into wildernesses of which she had never in her life even realized the existence. "There is a size at which grandeur begins; further on there is a size at which solemnity begins; further on, a size at which awfulness begins; further on, a size at which ghastliness begins. That size faintly approaches the size of the stellar universe. So am I not right in saying that those minds who exert their imaginative powers to bury themselves in the depths of that universe merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror?"

Standing, as she stood, in the presence of the stellar universe, under the very eyes of the constellations, Lady Constantine apprehended something of the argument.

"And to add a new weirdness to what the sky possesses in its size and formlessness, there is added the quality of decay. For all the wonder of these everlasting stars, eternal spheres, and what not, they are not everlasting, they are not eternal; they burn out like candles. You see that dying one in the body of the Great Bear? Two centuries ago it was as bright as the others. The senses may become terrified by plunging among them as they are, but there is a pitifulness even in their glory. Imagine them all extinguished, and your mind feeling its way through a heaven of total darkness, occasionally striking against

the black, invisible cinders of those stars. . . . If you are cheerful, and wish to remain so, leave the study of astronomy alone. Of all the sciences, it alone deserves the character of the terrible."

"I am not altogether cheerful."

"Then if, on the other hand, you are restless, worried by your worldly affairs, and anxious about the future, study astronomy at once. Your troubles will be reduced amazingly. But your study will reduce them in a singular way, by reducing the importance of everything. So that the science is still terrible, even as a panacea. It is quite impossible to think at all adequately of the sky, of what the sky substantially is, without feeling it as a juxtaposed nightmare, which it is better for men to forget than to bear clearly in mind. But you say the stars were not really what you came to see me about. What was it, may I ask, Lady Constantine?"

She mused, and sighed, and turned to him with something of the pathetic in her mien. "The immensity of the subject you have engaged me on has completely crushed my subject out of me. Yours is celestial; mine, lamentably human! And the less must give way to the greater."

"But is it, in a human sense, and apart from macrocosmic magnitudes, important?" he inquired, at last attracted by her manner; for he began to perceive, in spite of his prepossession, that she had really something on her mind.

"It is as important as personal troubles usually are."

Notwithstanding her preconceived notion of coming to Swithin as employer to dependent, as *chatelaine* to page, she was falling into confidential intercourse with him. His vast and romantic endeavors lent him a personal force and charm which she could not but apprehend. In the presence of the immensities that this young mind had, as it were, brought down from above to hers, they became unconsciously equal There was, moreover, an inborn liking in Lady Constantine to dwell less on her permanent position

as a county lady than on her passing emotions as a woman.

"I will postpone the matter I came to charge you with," she resumed, smiling. "I must reconsider it. Now I will return."

"Allow me to show you out through the trees and across the field?"

She said neither a distinct yes nor no; and, descending the tower, they threaded the firs and crossed the plowed field. By an odd coincidence he remarked, when they drew near the Great House: "You may possibly be interested in knowing, Lady Constantine, that that medium-sized star you see over there, low down in the south, is precisely over Sir Blount Constantine's head in the middle of Africa."

"How very strange that you should have said so!" she answered. "You have broached for me the very subject I had come to speak of."

"On a domestic matter?" he said, with surprise.

"Yes. What a small matter it seems now, after our astronomical stupendousness! and yet on my way to you it so far transcended the ordinary matters of my life as the subject you have led me up to transcends this. But," with a little laugh, "I will endeavor to sink down to such ephemeral trivialities as human tragedy, and explain, since I have come. The point is, I want a helper: no woman ever wanted one more. For days I have wanted a trusty friend who could go on a secret errand for me. It is necessary that my messenger should be educated, should be intelligent, should be silent as the grave. Do you give me your solemn promise as to the last point, if I confide in you?"

"Most emphatically, Lady Constantine."

"Your right hand upon the compact."

He gave his hand, and raised hers to his lips. In addition to his respect for her as the lady of the manor, there was the admiration of eighteen years for twenty-six in such relations.

"I trust you," she said. "Now, beyond the above conditions, it was specially necessary that my agent

should have known my husband well by sight when he was at home. For the errand is concerning my husband; I am much disturbed at what I have heard about him."

"I am indeed sorry to know it."

"There are only two people in the parish who fulfill all the conditions—Mr. Torkingham, and yourself. I sent for Mr. Torkingham, and he came. I could not tell him. I felt at the last moment that he wouldn't do. I have come to you because I think you will do. This is it: my husband has led me and all the world to believe that he is in Africa hunting lions. I have had a mysterious letter informing me that he has been seen in London in very peculiar circumstances. The truth of this I want ascertained. Will you go on the journey?"

"Personally, I would go to the end of the world for you, Lady Constantine; but—"

"No buts!"

"How can I leave?"

"Why not?"

"I am preparing a work on variable stars. There is one of those which I have exceptionally observed for several months, and on this my great theory is mainly based. It has been hitherto called irregular; but I have detected a periodicity in its so-called irregularities which, if proved, would add some very valuable facts to those known on this subject, one of the most interesting, perplexing, and suggestive in the whole field of astronomy. Now, to clinch my theory, there should be a sudden variation this week—or at latest next week—and I have to watch every night not to let it pass. You see my reason for declining, Lady Constantine."

"Young men are always so selfish!" she said.

"It might ruin the whole of my year's labor if I leave now!" returned the youth, greatly hurt. "Could you not wait a fortnight longer?"

"No—no. Don't think that I have asked you, pray. I have no wish to inconvenience you."

"Lady Constantine, don't be angry with me! Will

you do this—watch the star for me while I am gone? If you are prepared to do it effectually, I will go."

"Will it be much trouble?"

"It would be some trouble. You would have to come here every clear evening about nine. If the sky were not clear, then you would have to come at four in the morning, should the clouds have dispersed."

"Could not the telescope be brought to my house?"

Swithen shook his head. "Perhaps you did not observe its real size—that it was fixed to a frame-work? I could not afford to buy an equatorial, and I have been obliged to rig up an apparatus of my own devising, so as to make it in some measure answer the purpose of an equatorial. It *could* be moved, but I would rather not touch it."

"Well, I'll go to the telescope," she went on, with an emphasis that was not wholly playful. "You are the most ungallant youth I ever met with; but I suppose I must set that down to science. Yes, I'll go to the tower at nine every night."

"And alone? I should prefer to keep my pursuits there unknown."

"And alone," she answered, quite overborne by his inflexibility.

"You will not miss the morning observation, if it should be necessary?"

"I have given my word."

"And I give mine. I suppose I ought not to have been so exacting!" He spoke with that sudden emotional consciousness of his own transitoriness which made these alterations of mood possible. "I will go anywhere—do anything for you—this moment—to-morrow, or at any time. But you must return with me to the tower, and let me show you the observing process."

They retraced their steps, the tender hoar-frost taking the imprint of their feet, and two stars in the Twins looking down upon their two persons through the trees, as if those two persons could bear some sort of comparison with them. On the tower the instructions were given. When all was over, and he was

again conducting her to the great house, she said: "When can you start?"

"Now," said Swithin.

"So much the better. You shall go up by the night mail."

CHAPTER V.

ON the third morning after the young man's departure, Lady Constantine opened the post-bag anxiously. Though she had risen before four o'clock, and crossed to the tower through the gray half-light, when every blade and twig was furred with rime, she felt no languor. Expectation could banish at cock-crow the eye-heaviness which apathy had been unable to disperse all the day long.

There was, as she had hoped, a letter from Swithin St. Cleeve.

DEAR LADY CONSTANTINE: I have quite succeeded in my mission, and shall return to-morrow at ten P. M. I hope you have not failed in the observations. Watching the star through an opera-glass Sunday night, I fancied some change had taken place, but I could not make myself sure. Your memoranda for that night I await with impatience. Please don't forget to write down, *at the moment*, all remarkable appearances both as to color and intensity; and be very exact as to time, which correct in the way I showed you.

I am, dear Lady Constantine, yours most faithfully,

SWITHIN ST. CLEEVE.

Not another word in the letter about his errand; his mind ran on nothing but this astronomical subject. He had succeeded in his mission, and yet he did not even say yes or no to the great question—whether or not her husband was masquerading in London at the address she had given. "Was ever anything so provoking!" she cried.

However, the time was not long to wait. His way homeward would lie within a stone's throw of the manor house, and though for certain reasons she had forbidden him to call at the late hour of his arrival, she could easily intercept him in the avenue. At twenty minutes past ten she went out into the drive, and stood in the dark. Seven minutes later she heard his footstep, and saw his outline in the slit of light between the avenue trees. He had a valise in one hand, a great coat on his arm, and under his arm a parcel which seemed to be very precious, from the manner in which he held it.

"Lady Constantine?" he asked, softly.

"Yes," she said, in her excitement holding out both her hands, though he had plainly not expected her to offer one.

"Did you watch the star?"

"I'll tell you everything in detail; but, pray, your errand first!"

"Yes, it's all right. Did you watch every night—not missing one?"

"I forgot to go—twice," she murmured, contritely.

"Oh, Lady Constantine!" he cried, in dismay. "How *could* you serve me so! what shall I do!"

"Please forgive me! Indeed, I could not help it. I had watched and watched and watched, and nothing happened; and somehow my vigilance relaxed when I found nothing was likely to take place in the star."

"But the very circumstance of it not having happened made it all the more likely every day."

"Have you—seen——" she began, after a silence.

Swithin sighed, lowered his thoughts to sublunary things, and told briefly the story of his journey. Sir Blount Constantine was not in London at the address which had been anonymously sent her. It was a mistake of identity. The person who had been seen there Swithin had sought out. He resembled Sir Blount strongly; but he was a stranger.

"How can I reward you?" she exclaimed, when he had done.

"In no way but by giving me your good wishes in

what I am going to tell you on my own account." He spoke in tones of mysterious exultation. "This parcel is going to make my fame!"

"What is it?"

"A huge object-glass for the great telescope I am so busy about! Such a magnificent aid to science has never entered this country before, you may depend!"

He produced from under his arm the carefully cuddled-up package, which was in shape a round flat disk, like a dinner-plate, tied in paper.

Proceeding to explain his plans to her more fully, he walked with her towards the door by which she had emerged. It was a little side wicket through a wall dividing the open park from the garden terraces. Here for a moment he placed his valise and parcel on the opening of the stone balustrade, till he had bidden her farewell. Then he turned, and in laying hold of his bag by the dim light pushed the parcel over the parapet. It fell upon the paved walk ten or a dozen feet beneath.

"Oh, good heavens!"

"What?"

"My object-glass broken!"

"Is it of much value?"

"It cost all I possess."

He ran round by the steps to the lower lawn, Lady Constantine following, as he continued: "It is a magnificent six-inch first quality object lens. I took advantage of my journey to London to get it. I have been six weeks making the tube, of milled board; and as I had not enough money by twelve pounds for the lens, I borrowed it of my grandmother out of her last annuity payment. What can be—can be done!"

"Perhaps it is not broken."

He felt on the ground, found the parcel, and shook it. A clicking noise issued from inside. Swithin smote his forehead with his hand, and walked up and down like a mad fellow.

"My telescope! I have waited nine months for this lens. Now the possibility of setting up a really

powerful instrument is over! It is too cruel—how could it happen! . . . Lady Constantine, I am ashamed of myself—before you. Oh, but, Lady Constantine, if you only knew what it is to a person engaged in science to have the means of clinching a theory snatched away at the last moment! It is I against the world; and when the world has accidents on its side in addition to its natural strength, what chance for me!" The young astronomer leaned against the wall, and was silent. His misery was of an intensity and kind with that of Palissy, in these struggles with an adverse fate.

"Don't mind it,—pray don't!" said Lady Constantine, with deep feeling. "It is dreadfully unfortunate! You have my whole sympathy. Can it be mended?"

"Mended—no, no!"

"Cannot you do with your present one a little longer?"

"It is altogether inferior, cheap, and bad!"

"I'll get you another,—yes, indeed, I will! Allow me to get you another as soon as possible. I'll do anything to assist you out of your trouble; for I am most anxious to see you famous. I know you will be a great astronomer, in spite of this mishap! Come, say I may get a new one."

Swithin took her hand. He could not trust himself to speak.

Some days later a little box of peculiar kind came to the Great House. It was addressed to Lady Constantine, "with great care." She had it partly opened and taken to her own little writing-room; and after lunch, when she had dressed for walking, she took from the box a paper parcel like the one which had met with the accident. This she hid under her mantle, as if she had stolen it; and, going out slowly across the lawn, passed through the little door before spoken of, and was soon hastening in the direction of Rings-Hill column.

There was a bright sun overhead on that afternoon of early spring, and its rays shed an unusual warmth,

though shady places still retained the look and feel of winter. Rooks were already beginning to build new nests or to mend up old ones, and clamorously called in neighbors to give opinions on difficulties in their architecture. Lady Constantine swerved once from her path, as if she had decided to go to the homestead where Swithin lived; but on second thoughts she bent her steps to the column. Drawing near it, she looked up; but on account of the hight of the parapet nobody could be seen thereon who did not stand on tiptoe. She thought, however, that her young friend might possibly see her, if he were there, and come down; and that he was there she soon ascertained by finding the door unlocked, and the key inside. No movement, however, reached her ears from above, and she began to ascend.

Meanwhile affairs at the top of the column had progressed as follows. The afternoon being exceptionally fine, Swithin had ascended about two o'clock, and, seating himself at the little table which he had constructed on the spot, he began reading over his notes and examining some astronomical journals that had reached him in the morning. The sun blazed into the hollow roof-space as into a tube, and the sides kept out every breeze. Though the month was February below, it was May in the abacus of the column. The state of the atmosphere, and the fact that on the previous night he had pursued his observations till past two o'clock, produced in him at the end of half an hour an overpowering inclination to sleep. Spreading on the leadwork a thick rug, which he kept up there, he flung himself down against the parapet, and was soon in a state of unconsciousness.

It was about ten minutes afterwards that a soft rustle of silken clothes came up the spiral staircase, and, hesitating onward, reached the orifice, where appeard the form of Lady Constantine. She did not at first perceive that he was present, and stood still to reconnoiter. Her eye glanced over his telescope, now wrapped up, his table and papers, his observing-chair, and his contrivances for making the best of a defi-

ciency of instruments. All was warm, sunny, and silent, except that a solitary bee, which had somehow got within the hollow of the abacus, was singing round inquiringly, unable to discern that ascent was the only mode of escape. In another moment she beheld the astronomer, lying in the sun like a sailor in the main-top.

Lady Constantine coughed slightly: he did not awake. She then entered, and drawing the parcel from beneath her cloak, placed it on the table; after this she waited, looking for a long time at his sleeping face, which had a very interesting appearance. She seemed reluctant to leave, yet wanted resolution to wake him; and penciling his name on the parcel, she withdrew to the staircase, where the brushing of her dress decreased to silence as she receded round on her way to the base.

Swithin still slept on, and presently the rustle began again in the far-down interior of the column. The door could be heard closing, and the rustle came nearer, showing that she had shut herself in—no doubt to lessen the risk of an accidental surprise by any roaming villager. When Lady Constantine reappeared at the top, and saw the parcel still untouched, and Swithen asleep as before, she exhibited some disappointment; but she did not retreat.

Looking again at him, her eyes became so sentimentally fixed on his face that it seemed as if she could not withdraw them. There lay, in the shape of an Antinous, no *amoroso*, no gallant, but a guileless philosopher. His parted lips were lips that spoke, not of love, but of millions of miles; those were eyes which looked, not into the depths of woman's looks, but of stellar aspects and the configuration of constellations.

Thus, to his physical attractiveness was added the attractiveness of mental inaccessibility. The ennobling influence of scientific pursuits was demonstrated by the speculative purity which expressed itself in his eyes whenever he looked at her in speaking, and in the child-like faults of manner which arose from his obtuseness to their difference of sex. He had never

since becoming a man, looked even so low as to the level of a Lady Constantine. His heaven at present was truly in the skies, and not in that only other place where they say it can be found, in the eyes of some daughter of Eve. Would any Circe or Calypso—and if so what one?—ever check this pale haired scientist's nocturnal sailings into the interminable spaces overhead, and send all his mighty calculations on cosmic force and stellar fire flying into Limbo? Oh, the pity of it, if such should be the case!

She became much absorbed in these very womanly reflections; and at last Lady Constantine sighed, perhaps she herself did not exactly know why. Then a very soft expression lighted on her lips and eyes, and she looked at one jump seven years more youthful, —quite a girl in aspect, younger than he. On the table lay his implements; among them a pair of scissors, which, to judge from the shreds around, had been used in cutting curves in thick paper, for some calculating process.

What whim, agitation, or attraction prompted the impulse nobody knows; but she took the scissors, and, bending over the sleeping youth, cut off one of the curls, or rather crooks,—for they hardly reached a curl,—into which each lock of his hair chose to twist itself in the last inch of its length. The hair fell upon the rug. She picked it up quickly, returned the scissors to the table, and, as if her dignity had suddenly become ashamed of her fantasies, hastened through the door, and descended the staircase.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN his nap had naturally exhausted itself, Swithin awoke. He awoke without any surprise, for he not unfrequently gave to sleep in the day-time what he had stolen from it in the night watches. The first object that met his eyes was the parcel on the table, and, seeing his name inscribed thereon, he made no scruple to open it. The sun flashed upon a lens of surprising magnitude, polished to such a smoothness that the eye could scarcely meet its reflections. Here was a crystal, in whose depths were to be seen more wonders than had been revealed by the crystals of all the Cagliostros.

Swithin, hot with joyousness, took this treasure to his telescope manufactory at the homestead; then he started off for the Great House. On gaining its precincts he felt shy of calling, never having received any hint or permission to do so; while Lady Constantine's mysterious manner of leaving the parcel seemed to demand a like mysteriousness in his approaches to her. All the afternoon he lingered about uncertainly, in the hope of intercepting her on her return from a drive, occasionally walking with an indifferent lounge across glades commanded by the windows, that if she were in-doors she might know he was near. But she did not show herself during the daylight. Still impressed by her playful secrecy, he carried on the same idea after dark, by returning to the house, and passing through the garden door on to the lawn front, where he sat on the parapet that breasted the terrace. She frequently came out here for a melancholy saunter after dinner, and to-night was such an occasion. Swithin went forward, and met her at nearly the spot where he had dropped the lens some nights earlier.

"I have come to see you, Lady Constantine. How did the glass get on my table?"

She laughed as lightly as a girl; that he had come in this way was plainly no offense thus far.

"Perhaps it was dropped from the clouds by a bird," she said.

"Why should you be so good to me? Whatever discoveries result from this shall be ascribed to you as much as to me. Where should I have been without your gift?"

"You would possibly have accomplished your purpose just the same, and have been so much the nobler for your struggle against ill-luck. I hope that now you will be able to proceed with your large telescope as if nothing had happened."

"Oh, yes, I will, certainly. I am afraid I showed too much feeling, the reverse of stoical, when the accident occurred. That was not very noble of me."

"There is nothing unnatural in such feeling at your age. When you are older you will smile at such moods, and at the mishaps that gave rise to them."

"Ah, I perceive you think me weak in the extreme. But you will never realize that an incident which filled but a degree in the circle of your thoughts covered the whole circumference of mine. No person can see exactly what and where another's horizon is."

They soon parted, and she re-entered the house, where she sat reflecting for some time, till she seemed to fear that she had wounded his feelings. She awoke in the night, and thought the same thing more intensely. When it was morning she looked across at the tower, and, sitting down, wrote the following note:

DEAR MR. ST. CLEEVE.—I cannot allow you to remain under the impression that I despised your scientific endeavors in speaking as I did last night. I think you were too sensitive to my remark. But perhaps you were agitated with the labors of the day, and I fear that watching so late at night must make you very weary. If I can help you again, please let me know. I never realized the grandeur of astronomy

till you showed me how to do so. Also let me know about the new telescope. Come and see me at any time. After your great kindness in being my messenger I can never do enough for you. I wish you had a mother or sister, and pity your loneliness! I am lonely, too. Yours truly,

VIVIETTE CONSTANTINE.

She was so anxious that he should get this letter the same day that she ran across to the column with it during the morning, preferring to be her own emissary in so curious a case. The door, as she had expected, was locked; and, slipping the letter under it, she went home again. During lunch her ardor in the cause of Swithin's hurt feelings cooled down, till she exclaimed to herself, as she sat at her lonely table: "What could have possessed me to write in that way!"

After lunch she went faster to the tower than she had gone in the early morning, and peeped eagerly into the chink under the door. She could discern no letter, and on trying the latch found that the door would open. The letter was gone, Swithin having obviously arrived in the interval.

She blushed a blush which seemed to say: "I am getting foolishly interested in this young man." She had, in short, in her own opinion, somewhat overstepped the bounds of dignity. Her instincts did not square well with the formalities of her existence, and she walked home despondently.

Had a concert, bazaar, lecture or Dorcas meeting required the patronage and support of Lady Constantine at this juncture, the circumstance would probably have been sufficient to divert her mind from Swithin St. Cleeve and astronomy for some little time. But as none of these incidents were within the range of expectation,—Welland House and parish lying far from towns and watering-places—the void in her outer life continued, and with it the void in her inner life. The youth had not answered her letter; neither had he called upon her, in response to the invitation she

had regretted, with the rest of the epistle, as being somewhat too warmly informal for black and white. To speak tenderly to him was one thing, to write another—that was her feeling immediately after the event; but his countermove of silence and avoidance, though probably the result of pure unconsciousness on his part, completely dispersed such self-considerations now. Her eyes never fell upon the Ring's-Hill column without a solicitous wonder arising as to what he was doing. A natural woman, she would assume the remotest possibility to be the most likely contingency, if the possibility had the recommendation of being tragical; and she now feared that something was wrong with Swithin St. Cleeve. Yet there was not the least doubt that he had become so immersed in the business of the new telescope as to forget everything else.

On Sunday, between the services, she walked to Little Welland, chiefly for the sake of giving a run to a house-dog, a large black retriever, of whom she was fond. The distance was but short; and she returned along a narrow lane, divided from the river by a hedge, through whose leafless twigs the ripples flashed silver lights into her eyes. Here she discovered Swithin, leaning over a gate, his eyes bent upon the stream. The dog first attracted his attention; then he heard her, and turned round. She had never seen him looking so despondent.

"You have never called, though I invited you," said Lady Constantine.

"My great telescope won't work."

"I am sorry for that. So it has made you quite forget me?"

"Ah, yes; you wrote me a very kind letter, which I ought to have answered. Well, I *did* forget, Lady Constantine. My new telescope won't work; and I don't know what to do about it at all!"

"Can I assist you any further?"

"No, I fear not. Besides, you have assisted me already."

"What would really help you out of all your difficulties? Something would, surely?"

He shook his head.

"There must be some solution to them?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, with a hypothetical gaze into the stream; "*some* solution, of course—an equatorial, for instance."

"What's that?"

"Briefly, an impossibility. It is a splendid instrument, with an object lens of, say, six or nine inches aperture, mounted with its axis parallel to the earth's axis, and fitted up with graduated circles for denoting right ascensions and declinations; besides having special eye-pieces, a finder, and all sorts of appliances, clock-work, to make the telescope follow the motion in right ascension—I cannot tell you half the conveniences. Ah, an equatorial is a thing indeed!"

"An equatorial is the one instrument required to make you quite happy?"

"Well, yes."

"I'll see what I can do."

"But, Lady Constantine, an equatorial such as I describe costs as much as two grand pianos."

She was rather staggered at this news; but she rallied gallantly, and said: "Never mind. I'll make inquiries."

"But it could not be put on the tower without people seeing it. It would have to be fixed to the masonry. And there must be a dome of some kind to keep off the rain. A tarpaulin might do."

Lady Constantine reflected. "It would be a great business, I see," she said. "Though as far as the fixing and roofing go, I would of course consent to your doing what you liked with the old column. My workmen could fix it, could they not?"

"Oh, yes. But what would Sir Blount say, if he came home and saw the goings-on?"

Lady Constantine turned aside to hide a sudden displacement of blood from her cheek. "Ah—my husband!" she whispered. "I am just now going to church," she said. "I will think of this matter."

In church it was with Lady Constantine as with the Lord Angelo of Vienna, in a similar situation—Heaven

had her empty words only, and her invention heard not her tongue. She soon recovered from the momentary consternation into which she had fallen at Swithin's abrupt query. The possibility of that young astronomer becoming a renowned scientist by her aid was a thought which gave her secret pleasure. The course of rendering him instant material help began to have a great fascination for her; it was a new and unexpected channel for her cribbed and confined emotions. With experiences so much wider than his, Lady Constantine saw that the chances were perhaps a million to one against Swithin St. Cleeve ever being Astronomer-Royal, or Astronomer-Extraordinary of any sort; yet the remaining chance in his favor was one of those possibilities which, to a woman of bounding intellect and venturesome fancy, are pleasanter to dwell on than likely issues that have no savor of high speculation in them. The equatorial question was a great one; and she had caught such a large spark from his enthusiasm that she could think of nothing so piquant as how to obtain the important instrument.

When Tabitha Lark arrived at the Great House, next day, instead of finding Lady Constantine in bed, she discovered her in the library, poring over what astronomical works she had been able to unearth from the shelves. As these publications were, for a science of such rapid development, somewhat venerable, there was not much help of a practical kind to be gained from them. Nevertheless, the equatorial retained a hold upon her fancy, till she became as eager to see one on the Rings-Hill column as Swithin himself.

The upshot of it was that Lady Constantine sent a message that evening to Rings-Hill Bottom, where the homestead of Swithin's grandmother was situated, requesting the young man's presence at the house at twelve o'clock next day. He promptly returned an obedient reply, and the circumstance was enough to lend great freshness to her manner next morning, instead of the leaden air which was too frequent to her before the sun reached the meridian, and sometimes after. The mental room taken up by an idea depends

as largely on the available space for it as on its nominal magnitude; in Lady Constantine's life of infestivity, in her domestic voids, and in her social discouragements, there was nothing to oust the lightest fancy. Swithin had, in fact, arisen as an attractive little interpolation between herself and despair.

CHAPTER VII.

A FOG deformed all the trees of the park that morning; the white atmosphere adhered to the ground like a fungoid grown from it, and made the turfed undulations look slimy and raw; but Lady Constantine settled down in her chair to await the coming of the late curate's son, with a serenity which the vast blanks outside could neither destroy nor baffle. At two minutes to twelve the door-bell rang, and a look overspread the lady's face that was neither maternal, sisterly, nor amorous, but partook in an indescribable manner of all three. The door was flung open and the young man was ushered in, the fog still clinging to his hair, in which she could discern a little notch where she had nipped off the curl.

A speechlessness that socially was a defect in him was to her view a piquant attribute just now. He looked rather alarmed. "Lady Constantine, have I done anything"—he began breathlessly, as he gazed in her face, with parted lips.

"Oh, no, of course not. I have decided to do something—nothing more," she said, holding out her hand, which he rather gingerly touched. "Don't look so concerned. Who makes equatorials?"

This remark was like the drawing of a weir-hatch, and she was speedily inundated with all she wished to know concerning astronomical opticians. When he had imparted the particulars he waited, manifestly burning to know whither these inquiries tended.

"I am not going to buy you one," she said, gently He looked as if he would faint.

"Certainly not. I do not wish it. I——I could not have accepted it," said the young man.

"But I am going to buy one for myself. I lack a hobby, and I shall choose astronomy. I shall fix my equatorial on the column."

Swithin brightened up.

"And I shall let you have the use of it whenever you choose. In brief, Swithin St. Cleeve shall be Lady Constantine's Astronomer-Royal; and she ——"

"Shall be his queen." The words came not much the worse for being uttered only in the tone of one anxious to complete a tardy sentence.

"Well, that's what I have decided to do," resumed Lady Constantine. "I will write to these opticians at once."

There seemed to be no more for him to do than to thank her for the privilege, which he promptly did, and then made as if to go. But Lady Constantine detained him, with: "Have you ever seen my library?"

"No; never."

"You don't say you would like to see it."

"But I should."

"It is the third door on the right. You can find your way in, and you can stay there as long as you like."

Swithin then left the morning-room for the apartment designated, and amused himself in that "soul of the house," as Cicero defined it, till he heard the lunch-bell sounding from the turret, when he came down from the library steps, and thought it time to go home. But at that moment a servant entered to inquire whether he would prefer to have his lunch brought in to him there, and upon his replying in the affirmative, a large tray arrived on the stomach of a footman, and Swithin was greatly surprised to see a whole pheasant placed at his disposal.

Having breakfasted at eight that morning, and having been much in the open air afterward, the Adonis astronomer's appetite assumed grand proportions. How much of that pheasant he might consistently eat without hurting his dear patroness Lady Constantine's feelings, when he could readily eat it all, was a

problem in which the reasonableness of a larger and larger quantity argued itself inversely as a smaller and smaller quantity remained. When, at length, he had finally decided on a terminal point in the body of the bird, the door was gently opened.

"Oh, you have not finished?" came to him over his shoulder, in a considerate voice.

"Oh, yes, thank you, Lady Constantinne," he said, jumping up.

"Why did you prefer to lunch in this awkward, dusty place?"

"I thought—it would be better," said Swithin, simply.

"There is fruit in the other room, if you like to come. But perhaps you would rather not?"

"Oh, yes, I should much like to," said Swithin, walking over his napkin, and following her as she led the way to the adjoining apartment.

Here, while she asked him what he had been reading, he modestly ventured on an apple, in whose flavor he recognized the familiar taste of old friends robbed from her husband's orchards in his childhood, long before Lady Constantine's advent on the scene. She supposed he confined his search to his own sublime subject, astronomy.

Swithin suddenly became older to the eye, as his thoughts reverted to the topic thus reintroduced. "Yes," he informed her. "I seldom read any other subject. In these days the secret of productive study is to avoid well."

"Did you find any good treatise?"

"None. The theories in your books are almost as obsolete as the Ptolemaic system. Only fancy, that magnificent Cyclopædia, leather-bound, and stamped, and gilt, and wide-margined, and bearing the blazon of your house in magnificent colors, says that the twinkling of the stars is probably caused by heavenly bodies passing in front of them in their revolutions."

"And is it not so? That was what I learned when I was a girl."

The modern Eudoxus now rose above the embarrassing horizon of Lady Constantine's great house, magnificent furniture, and awe-inspiring footmen. He became quite natural, all his self-consciousness fled, and his eye spoke into hers no less than his lips to her ears, as he said: "How such a theory can have lingered on to this day beats conjecture! Francois Arago, as long as fifty or sixty years ago, conclusively established the fact that scintillation is the simplest thing in the world—merely a matter of atmosphere. But I won't speak of this to you now. The comparative absence of scintillation in warm countries was noticed by Humboldt. Then, again, the scintillations vary. No star flaps his wings like Sirius when he lies low! He flashes out emeralds and rubies, amethystine flames and sapphirine colors, in a manner quite marvelous to behold. And this is only *one* star! So, too, do Arcturus, and Capella, and lesser luminaries. . . . But I tire you with this subject?"

"On the contrary, you speak so beautifully that I could listen all day."

The astronomer threw a searching glance upon her for a moment; but there was no satire in the warm, soft eyes which met his own with a luxurious contemplative interest.

"Say some more of it to me," she continued, in a voice not far removed from coaxing.

After some hesitation the subject returned again to his lips, and he said some more—indeed, much more; Lady Constantine often throwing in an appreciative remark or question, oftener meditatively regarding him, in pursuance of ideas not exactly based on his words, and letting him go on as he would.

Before he left the house the new astronomical project was set in train. The top of the column was to be roofed in, to form a proper observatory; and on the ground that he knew better than any one else how this was to be carried out, she requested him to give precise directions on the point, and to superintend the whole. A wooden cabin was to be erected at the foot of the tower, to provide better accommodation for

casual visitors to the observatory than the spiral staircase and lead-flat afforded. As this cabin would be completely buried in the dense pine foliage which enveloped the lower part of the column and its pedestal, it would be no disfigurement to the general appearance. Finally, a path was to be made across the surrounding fallow, by which she might easily approach the scene of her new study.

When he was gone she wrote to the firm of opticians concerning the equatorial for whose reception all this was designed.

The undertaking was soon in full progress; and by degrees it became the talk of the hamlets round that Lady Constantine had given up melancholy for astronomy, to the great advantage of all who came in contact with her. One morning, when Tabitha Lark had come as usual to read, Lady Constantine chanced to be in a quarter of the house to which she seldom wandered; and while here she heard her maid talking confidentially to Tabitha in the adjoining room on the curious and sudden interest which Lady Constantine had acquired in the moon and stars.

"They do say all sorts of trumpery," observed the hand-maid. "They say—though 'tis little better than mischief, to be sure—that it isn't the moon, and it isn't the stars, and it isn't the plannards, that my lady cares for, but for the pretty lad who draws 'em down from the sky to please her; and being a married example, and what with sin and shame knocking at every poor maid's door afore you can say, 'Hands off, my dear,' to the civilest young man, she ought to set a better pattern."

Lady Constantine's face flamed up vividly.

"If Sir Blount were to come back all of a sudden—oh my!"

Lady Constantine grew cold as ice.

"There's nothing in it," said Tabitha, scornfully. "I could prove it any day."

"Well, I wish I had half her chance!" sighed the lady's maid. And no more was said on the subject then.

Tabitha's remarks showed that the suspicion was quite an embryo one as yet. Nevertheless, saying nothing to reveal what she had overheard, immediately after the reading Lady Constantine flew like a bird to where she knew that Swithin might be found. He was in the plantation, sticking up little sticks to mark where the wooden cabin was to stand. She called him to a remote place under the funereal trees. "I have altered my mind," she said. "I can have nothing to do with this matter."

"Indeed?" said Swithin, surprised.

"Astronomy is not my hobby any longer. And *you* are not my Astronomer-Royal."

"Oh, Lady Constantine!" cried the youth, aghast. "Why; the work is begun. I thought the equatorial was ordered."

She dropped her voice, though there was nobody to hear even a Jericho shout. "Of course astronomy is my hobby privately, and you are to be my Astronomer-Royal, and I still furnish the observatory; but not to the outer world. There is a reason against my indulgence in such scientific fancies openly; and the project must be arranged in this wise. The whole enterprise is yours; you rent the tower of me; you build the cabin; you get the equatorial. I simply give permission, since you desire it. The path that was to be made from the hill to the park is not to be thought of. There is to be no communication between the house and the column. The equatorial will arrive addressed to you, and its cost I will pay through you. My name must not appear, and I vanish entirely from the undertaking. . . . This blind is necessary," she added, sighing. "Good-by."

"But you *do* take as much interest as before, and it *will* be yours just the same?" he said, walking after her. He scarcely comprehended the subterfuge, and was absolutely blind as to its reason.

"Can you doubt it? But I dare not do it openly."

With this she went away; and in due time there circulated through the parish an assertion that it was a mistake to suppose Lady Constantine had anything to

do with Swithin St. Cleeve or his star-gazing schemes. She had merely allowed him to rent the tower of her for use as his observatory, and to put some temporary fixtures on it for that purpose.

After this Lady Constantine lapsed into her former life of loneliness; and by these prompt measures the ghost of a rumor which had barely started into existence was speedily laid to rest. It had probably originated in her own house, and had gone out little further. Yet, despite her self-control, a certain north window of the Great House, that commanded an uninterrupted view of the upper ten feet of the column, revealed her as somewhat frequently gazing from it at a rotundity which had begun to appear on the summit. To those with whom she came in contact she sometimes addressed such remarks as: "Is young Mr. St. Cleeve getting on with his observatory? I hope he will fix his instruments without damaging the column, which is so interesting to us as being in memory of my dear husband's great-grandfather—a truly brave man."

On one occasion her building-steward ventured to suggest to her that, Sir Blount having deputed to her the power to grant short leases in his absence, she should have a distinctive agreement with Swithin, as between landlord and tenant, with a stringent clause against his driving nails into the stone-work of such a historical memorial. She replied that she did not wish to be severe on the last representative of such old and respected parishioners as his mother's family had been, and of such a well-descended family as his father's; so that it would only be necessary for the steward to keep an eye on Mr. St. Cleeve's doings.

Further, when a letter arrived at the Great House from Hilton and Pimm's, the opticians, with information that the equatorial was ready and packed, and that a man would be sent with it to fix it, she replied to that firm to the effect that their letter should have been addressed to Mr. St. Cleeve, the local astronomer, on whose behalf she had made the inquiries; that she had nothing more to do with the matter: that he

would receive the instrument and pay the bill,—her guarantee being given for the latter performance.

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY CONSTANTINE then had the pleasure of beholding a wagon, laden with packing-cases, in the act of crossing the field towards the pillar; and not many days later Swithin, who had never come to the Great House since the luncheon, met her in a path which he knew to be one of her promenades.

"The equatorial is fixed, and the man gone," he said, half in doubt as to his speech, for her commands to him not to recognize her agency or patronage still puzzled him. "I respectfully wish—you could come and see it, Lady Constantine."

"I would rather not ; I cannot."

"Saturn is lovely ; Jupiter is simply sublime ; I can see double stars in the Lion and Virgin where I had seen only a single one before. It is all I required to set me going !"

"Is it so? I'll come—but you need say nothing about my visit. I cannot come to night, but will come some time this week. Yet only this once, to try the instrument. Afterwards you must be content to pursue your studies alone."

Swithin seemed but little affected at this announcement. "Hilton and Pimm's man handed me the bill." he continued.

"How much is it?"

He told her. "And the man who has built the hut and dome, and done other fixing, has sent in his." He named this amount also.

"Very well. They shall be settled with. My debts must be paid with my money, which you shall have at once—in cash, since a check would hardly do. Come to the house for it this evening. But no, no !—you must not come openly ; such is the world. Come to the window—the window that is exactly in a line

with the long snow-drop bed, in the south front—at eight to-night, and I will give you what is necessary."

"Certainly," said the young man. respectfully.

At eight that evening, accordingly, Swithin entered like a ghost upon the terrace to seek out the spot she had designated. The equatorial had so entirely absorbed his thoughts that he did not trouble himself seriously to conjecture the why and wherefore of her secrecy. If he casually thought of it, he set it down in a general way to an intensely generous wish on her part not to lessen his influence among the sparse inhabitants by making him appear the object of patronage.

While he stood by the long snow-drop bed, which looked up at him like another Milky Way, the French casement of the window opposite softly opened, and a hand bordered by a glimmer of lace was stretched forth, from which he received a crisp little parcel—bank notes, apparently. He knew the hand, and held it long enough to press it to his lips, the only form which had ever occurred to him of expressing his gratitude to her without the incumbrance of clumsy words—a vehicle at the best of times but rudely suited for such delicate merchandise. The hand was hastily withdrawn, as if the treatment had been unexpected. Then seemingly moved by second thoughts, she bent forward and said : "Is the night good for observations ?"

"Perfect."

"Then I'll come to-night ; it makes no difference to me, after all. Wait just one moment."

He waited, and presently she emerged, muffled up like a nun ; whereupon they left the terrace and struck across the park together. Very little was said by either till they were crossing the fallow, when he asked her if his arm would help her. She did not take the offered support just then ; but when they were ascending under the heavy gloom of fir trees she seized it, as if rather influenced by the oppressive solitude than by fatigue.

Thus they reached the foot of the column, ten thous-

and spirits in prison seeming to grasp their griefs from the funeral boughs overhead, and a few twigs scratching the pillar with the drag of impish claws as tenacious as those figuring in St. Anthony's temptation.

"How intensely dark it is just here," she whispered. "I wonder you can keep in the path. Many ancient Britons lie buried here, doubtless."

He led her round to the other side, where, feeling with his hands, he suddenly left her, appearing a moment after with a light.

"What place is this?" she exclaimed.

"This is the cabin," said he; and she could just discern the outline of a little house, not unlike a bathing-machine without wheels. "I have kept lights ready here, as I thought you might come any evening, and possibly bring company."

"Don't quarrel with me for coming alone!" she exclaimed, with sensitive promptness. "There are reasons for what I do of which you know nothing."

"Perhaps it is much to my discredit that I don't know."

"Not at all. You are all the better for it. God forbid that I should enlighten you. Well, I see this is the hut. But I am more curious to go to the top, and make discoveries."

He brought a little lantern from the cabin, and lighted her up the winding staircase to the temple of that sublime mystery on whose threshold he stood as priest. The top of the column was quite changed. The tub-shaped space within the parapet, formerly open to the air and sun, was now arched over by a light dome of lath-work covered with felt. But this dome was not fixed. At the line where its base descended to the parapet there were half a dozen iron balls, precisely like cannon-shot, standing loosely in a groove, and on these the dome rested its whole weight. In the side of the dome was a slit, through which the wind blew and the North Star beamed, and toward it the end of the great telescope was directed. This latter magnificent object, with its circles, axes,

and handles complete, was securely fixed in the middle of the floor.

"But you can only see one part of the sky through that slit," said she.

The astronomer stretched out his arm, and the whole dome turned horizontally round, running on the balls with a rumble like that of near thunder. Instead of the star Polaris, which had been peeping in upon them through the slit, there now appeared the face of Castor and Pollux. Swithin then manipulated the equatorial, and put it through its capabilities in like manner.

She was enchanted; being rather excitable, she even clapped her hands just once. She turned to him: "Now are you happy?"

"But it is all *yours*, Lady Constantine."

"At this moment. But that's a defect which can soon be remedied. When is your birthday?"

"Next month,—the seventh."

"Then it shall all be yours,—a birthday present."

The young man protested; it was too much.

"No, you must accept it all,—equatorial, dome, stand, hut, and everything that has been put here for this astronomical purpose. The possession of these apparatus would only compromise me. Already they are reputed to be yours, and they must be made yours. There is no help for it. If ever" (here her voice lost some firmness),—"if ever you go away from me—from this place, I mean—and marry, and settle in a new home elsewhere for good, you must take these things, equatorial and all, and never tell how they came to be yours."

"I wish I could do something more for you!" exclaimed the much-moved astronomer. "If you could but share my fame—supposing I get any, which I may die before doing—it would be a little compensation. As to my going away and marrying, I certainly shall not. I may go away, but I shall never marry."

"Why not?"

"A beloved science is enough wife for me—com-

bined, perhaps, with a little warm friendship with one of kindred pursuits."

"Who is the friend?"

"Yourself I should like it to be."

"You would have to become a woman before I could be that, publicly; or I a man," she replied, with dry melancholy.

"Why a woman, dear Lady Constantine?"

"I cannot explain. No; you must keep your fame and your science all to yourself, and I must keep my —troubles."

Swithin, to divert her from melancholy—not knowing that in the expression of her melancholy thus and now she found much pleasure—changed the subject by asking if they should take some observations.

"Yes; the scenery is well hung to-night," she said, looking out upon the heavens.

Then they proceeded to scan the sky, roving from planet to star, from single stars to double stars, from double to colored stars, in the cursory manner of the merely curious. They plunged down to that at other times invisible stellar multitude in the back rows of the celestial theater: remote layers of constellations whose shapes were new and singular; pretty twinklers which for infinite ages had spent their beams without calling forth from a single poet a single line, or being able to bestow a ray of comfort on a single benighted traveler.

"And to think," said Lady Constantine, "that the whole race of shepherds, since the beginning of the world—even those immortal shepherds who watched near Bethlehem—should have gone into their graves without knowing that for one star that lighted them in their labors there were ten as good behind trying to do so! . . . I have a feeling for this instrument not unlike the awe I should feel in the presence of a great magician in whom I really believed. Its powers are so enormous, and weird, and fantastical, that I should have a personal fear in being with it alone. Music drew an angel down, said the poet; but what is that to drawing down worlds!"

"I often experience a kind of fear of the sky after sitting in the observing chair a long time. And when I walk home afterwards I fear it, for what I know is there, but cannot see, as one naturally fears the presence of a vast something that only reveals a very little of itself. That's partly what I meant by saying that magnitude, which up to a certain point has grandeur, has beyond it ghastliness."

Thus the interest of their sidereal observations led them on, till the knowledge that scarce any other human vision was traveling within a hundred million miles of their own gave them such a sense of the isolation of that faculty as almost to be a sense of isolation as regarded their whole personality, causing a shudder at its absoluteness. At night, when human discords and harmonies are hushed, in a general sense, for the greater part of 12 hours, there is nothing to moderate the blow with which the infinitely great, the stellar universe, strikes down upon the infinitely little, the mind of the beholder; and this was the case now. Having got closer to immensity than their fellow-creatures, they saw at once its beauty and its frightfulness. They more and more felt the contrast between their own tiny magnitudes and those among which they had recklessly plunged, till they were oppressed with the presence of a vastness they could not cope with even as an idea, which hung about them like a nightmare.

He stood by her while she observed; she by him when they changed places. Once that Swithin's emancipation from a trammeling body had been effected by the telescope, and he was well away in space, she felt her influence over him diminishing to nothing. He was quite unconscious of his terrestrial neighborings, and of herself as one of them. It still farther reduced her toward simplicity.

The silence was broken only by the ticking of the clock-work which gave diurnal motion to the instrument. To expect that he was ever voluntarily going to end the pause by speech was apparently futile. She laid her hand upon his arm. He started, withdrew

his eye from the telescope, and brought himself back from the earth by a visible effort.

"Do come out of it!" she coaxed, with a softness in her voice which any man but Swithin would have felt to be exquisite. "I feel that I have been so foolish as to put in your hands an instrument to effect my own annihilation. Not a word have you spoken for this last ten minutes."

"I have been mentally getting on with my great theory. I hope soon to be able to publish it to the world. What, are you going? I will walk with you, Lady Constantine. When will you come again?"

"When your great theory is published to the world."

CHAPTER IX.

LADY CONSTANTINE, if narrowly observed at this time, would have seemed to be deeply troubled in conscience, and particularly after the interview above described. Ash-Wednesday occurred in the calender a few days later, and she went to morning service with a look of genuine contrition on her emotional and yearning countenance. Besides herself the congregation consisted only of the parson, clerk, school-children, and three old people living on alms, who sat under the reading-desk; and thus, when Mr. Torkingham blazed forth the denunciatory sentences of the Commination, the whole force of them seemed to descend upon her own shoulders. Looking across the empty pews, she saw through the one or two clear panes of the window opposite a figure in the church-yard, and the very feeling against which she had tried to pray came back again. When she came out and had crossed into the private walk, Swithin came forward to speak to her. This was a most unusual circumstance, and argued a matter of importance.

"I have made an amazing discovery in connection with the variable stars!" he exclaimed. "It will excite the whole astronomical world, and the world

outside but little less. I had long suspected the true secret of their variability; but it was by the merest chance on earth that I hit upon a proof of my guess. Your equatorial has done it, my good, kind Lady Constantine, and our fame is established forever!" He sprang into the air, and waved his hat in his triumph.

"Oh, I am so glad—so rejoiced!" she cried. "What is it? But don't stop to tell me. Publish it at once in some paper; nail your name to it, or somebody will seize the idea and appropriate it—forestall you in some way. It will be Adams and Leverrier over again."

"If I may walk with you I will explain the nature of the discovery. It accounts for the occasional green tint of Castor and every difficulty. I said I would be the Copernicus of the stellar system, and I have begun to be. Yet who knows?"

"Now don't be so up and down! I shall not understand your explanation, and I would rather not know it. I shall reveal it if it is very grand. Women, you know, are not safe depositaries of such valuable secrets. You may walk with me a little way, with great pleasure. Then go and write your account, so as to insure your ownership of the discovery. . . . But how you have watched!" she cried, in a sudden accession of anxiety, as she turned to look more closely at him. "The orbits of your eyes are leaden, and your eyelids are red and heavy. Don't do it—pray don't! You will be ill, and break down."

"I have, it is true, been up a little late this last week," he said, cheerfully. "In fact, I couldn't tear myself away from the equatorial; it is such a wonderful possession that it keeps me there till daylight. But what does that matter, now I have made the discovery?"

"Ah, it *does* matter! Now, promise me—I insist—that you will not commit such imprudences again; for what should I do if my Astronomer-Royal were to die?" She laughed, but far too apprehensively to be effective as a display of levity.

They parted, and he went home to write out his

paper. He promised to call as soon as his discovery was in print. Then they waited for the result.

It is impossible to describe the tremulous state of Lady Constantine during the interval. The warm interest she took in Swithin St. Cleeve—many would have said dangerously warm interest—made his hopes her hopes; and though she sometimes admitted to herself that great allowance was requisite for the overweening confidence of youth in the future, she permitted herself to be blinded to probabilities for the pleasure of sharing his dreams. It seemed not unreasonable to suppose the present hour to be the beginning of realization to her darling wish that this young man should become famous. He had worked hard, and why should he not be famous early? His very simplicity in mundane affairs afforded a strong presumption that in things celestial he might be wise. To obtain support for this hypothesis she only had to think over the lives of many eminent astronomers.

She waited patiently for the flourish of trumpets from afar, by which she expected the announcement of his discovery to be greeted. Knowing that immediate intelligence of the outburst would be brought to her by himself, she watched from the windows of the Great House each morning for a sight of his figure hastening down the glade. But he did not come.

A long array of wet days passed their dreary shapes before her, and made the waiting still more tedious. On one of these occasions she ran across to the tower, at the risk of a severe cold. The door was locked still. But this was only to be expected in such weather. Yet she would have gone on to his house, had there not been one reason too many against such precipitancy. As astronomer and astronomer there was no harm in their meetings; but as woman and man she feared them—for herself, at any rate.

Ten days passed without a sight of him; ten blurred and dreary days, during which the whole landscape dripped like a mop, and the park trees swabbed the gravel from the drive, while the sky was lined with a thick vault of immovable cloud. It seemed as if the

whole science of astronomy had never been real, and that the heavenly bodies, with their motions, were as theoretical as the moves and pieces at a bygone game of chess.

She could content herself no longer with fruitless visits to the column, and when the rain had a little abated she walked to the nearest hamlet, and in a conversation with the first old woman she met contrived to lead up to the subject of Swithin St. Cleeve, by talking about his grandmother.

"Ah, poor old heart; 't is a bad time for her, my lady!" exclaimed the dame.

"Why?"

"Her grandson is dying; and such a gentleman born!"

"Oh, it has something to do with that terrible discovery!"

"What, my lady?"

She left the old woman with an evasive answer, and with a breaking heart crept along the road. Tears brimmed into her eyes as she walked, and by the time that she was out of sight sobs burst forth tumultuously. "I am too fond of him, but I can't help it, and I don't care—I don't care!"

Without further considerations as to who beheld her doings, she instinctively went straight toward Mrs. Martin's. Seeing a man coming, she calmed herself sufficiently to ask him through her dropped veil how poor Mr. St. Cleeve was that day. But she only got the same reply: "They say he is dying, my lady."

When Swithin had parted from Lady Constantine, on the previous Ash-Wednesday, he had gone straight to the homestead and prepared his account of a New Astronomical Discovery. It was written perhaps in too glowing a rhetoric for the true scientific tone of mind; but there was no doubt that his assertion met with a most startling aptness all the difficulties which had accompanied the received theories on the phenomena attending those marvelous suns of marvelous systems so far away. It accounted for the nebulous

mist that surrounds some of them at their weakest time; in short, took up a position of probability, which has never yet been assailed.

The papers were written in triplicate, and carefully sealed up with blue wax. One copy was directed to Greenwich, another to the Royal Society, another to a prominent astronomer. A brief statement of the essence of the discovery was also prepared for the leading daily paper.

He considered these documents, embodying as they did, two years of his constant thought, reading, and observation, too important to be entrusted for posting to the hands of a messenger; too important to be sent to the sub-post-office at hand. Though the day was wet, dripping wet, he went on foot with them to the chief office, five miles off, and registered them. Quite exhausted by the walk, after his long night-work, wet through, yet sustained by the sense of a great achievement, he called at a bookseller's for the astronomical periodicals to which he subscribed; then, resting a short time at an inn, he plodded his way homeward, reading his papers as he went, and planning how to enjoy a repose, on his laurels, of a week or more.

On he strolled through the rain, holding the umbrella vertically over the exposed page to keep it dry while he read. Suddenly his eye was struck by an article. It was the review of a pamphlet by an American astronomer, in which the author announced a conclusive discovery with regard to variable stars.

The discovery was precisely the discovery of Swithin St. Cleeve. Another man had forestalled his fame by a period of about six weeks.

Then the youth found that the goddess Philosophy, to whom he had vowed to dedicate his whole life, would not, in return, support him through a single hour of despair. In truth, the impishness of circumstances was newer to him than it would have been to a philosopher of three score and ten. In a wild wish for annihilation he flung himself down on a patch of heather that lay a little removed from the road, and in this watery bed remained motionless, while time passed

by unheeded. At last, from sheer misery and weariness, he fell asleep. The March rain pelted him mercilessly, the beaded moisture from the heavily charged locks of heath penetrated him through back and sides, and clotted his hair to unsightly tags and tufts. When he awoke it was dark. He thought of his grandmother, and of her possible alarm at missing him. On attempting to rise, he found that he could hardly bend his joints, and that his clothes were as heavy as lead from saturation. His teeth chattering and his knees trembling, he pursued his way home, where his appearance excited great concern. He was obliged at once to retire to bed, and the next day he was delirious from the chill.

It was about ten days after this unhappy occurrence that Lady Constantine learned the news, as above described, and hastened along to the homestead in that state of anguish in which the heart is no longer under the control of the judgment, and self-abandonment, even to error, verges on heroism. On reaching the house in Rings-Hill Bottom, the door was opened to her by old Hannah who wore an assiduously sorrowful look; and Lady Constantine was shown into the large room—so wide that the beams bent in the middle—where she took her seat in one of a methodic range of chairs, beneath a portrait of the Reverend Mr. St. Cleeve, her astronomer's erratic father.

The eight unwatered plants, in the row of eight flower-pots, denoted that there was something wrong in the house. Mrs. Martin came down stairs, fretting, her wonder at beholding Lady Constantine not altogether displacing the previous mood. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish, my lady!" she exclaimed.

Lady Constantine said: "Hush!" and pointed inquiringly upward.

"He is not overhead, my lady," replied Swithin's grandmother. "His bedroom is at the back of the house."

"How is he now?"

"He is better, just at this moment; and we are more hopeful. But he changes so."

"May I go up? I know he would like to see me."

Her presence having been made known to the sufferer, she was conducted up-stairs to Swithin's room. The way thither was through the large chamber he had used as a study and for the manufacture of optical instruments. There lay the large pasteboard telescope, that had been just such a failure as Crusoe's large boat; there were his diagrams, maps, globes, and celestial apparatus of various sorts. The absence of the worker through illness or death is sufficient to touch the prosiest workshop with the hues of pathetic romance, and it was with a swelling bosom that Lady Constantine passed through this arena of his youthful activities to the little chamber where he lay.

Old Mrs. Martin sat down by the window, and Lady Constantine bent over Swithin.

"Don't speak to me!" she whispered. "It will weaken you; it will excite you. If you do speak, it must be very softly." She took his hand, and one irrepressible tear fell upon it.

"Nothing will excite me now, Lady Constantine," he said; "not even your goodness in coming. My last excitement was when I lost the battle. . . . Do you know that my last discovery has been forestalled? It is that that is killing me."

"But you are going to recover; you are better, they say. Is it so?"

"I think I am, to-day. But who can be sure?"

"The poor boy was so upset at finding that his labor was thrown away," said his grandmother, "that he lay down in the rain, and chilled his life out."

"How could you do it?" Lady Constantine whispered. "How could you think so much of renown, and so little of me? Why, for every discovery made there are ten behind that await making. To commit suicide like this, as if there were nobody in the world to care for you."

"It was done in my haste, and I am very, sorry for it! I beg both you and all my few friends never, never to forgive me! It would kill me with self-reproach if you were to pardon my rashness!"

At this moment the doctor was announced, and Mrs. Martin went down-stairs to receive him. Lady Constantine thought she would remain to hear his report, and for this purpose came out, and sat down in a nook of the adjoining work-room of Swithin, the doctor meeting her as he passed through it into the sick chamber.

He was there during what seemed a torturingly long time; but at length he came out to the room she waited in, and crossed it on his way down-stairs. She rose and followed him to the stair head.

"How is he?" she anxiously asked. "Will he get over it?"

The doctor, not knowing the depth of her interest in the patient, spoke with the blunt candor natural towards a comparatively indifferent inquirer. "No, Lady Constantine," he replied; "there's a change for the worse." And he retired down the stairs.

Scarcely knowing what she did, Lady Constantine ran back to Swithin's side, flung herself upon the bed, and in a throb of sorrow kissed him.

CHAPTER X.

THE placid inhabitants of the parish of Welland, including warbling wagoners, lone shepherds, plowmen, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the gardener at the Great House, the steward and agent, the parson, clerk, and so on, were hourly expecting the announcement of St. Cleeve's death. The sexton had been going to see his brother-in-law, nine miles distant, but promptly postponed the visit for a few days, that there might be the regular professional hand present to toll the bell in a note of due fullness and solemnity; an attempt by a deputy, on a previous occasion of his absence, having degenerated into a miserable stammering clang that was a disgrace to the parish. But Swithin St. Cleeve did not decease, a fact which, indeed, the habituated reader will

have been well aware ever since the rain came down upon the young man in the twenty-sixth paragraph of the ninth chapter, and led to his alarming illness. Too many maimed histories (such as his would have read, in those circumstances) are hourly enacting themselves in this dun-colored world to justify the gratuitous infliction of yet other mournful details concerning those

> "Who lay great bases for eternity
> Which prove more short than waste or ruining."

How it arose that he did not die was in this wise; and his example affords another instance of that reflex rule of the vassal mind over the sovereign body, which, operating so wonderfully in elastic natures, and more or less in all, originally gave rise to the legend that the supremacy lay on the other side.

The evening of the day after the tender, despairing farewell kiss of Lady Constantine, when he was a little less weak than during her visit, he lay with his face to the window. He lay alone, quiet and resigned. He had been thinking, sometimes of her and other friends, but chiefly of his lost discovery. Although nearly unconscious at the time, he had yet been aware of that kiss, as the delicate flush which followed it upon his cheek would have told; but he had attached little importance to it as between woman and man. Had he been dying of love instead of wet weather, perhaps the impulsive act of that handsome lady would have been seized on as a proof that his love was returned; as it was, her kiss seemed but the evidence of a naturally demonstrative kindness, felt toward him chiefly because he was believed to be leaving her forever.

The reds of sunset passed, as dusk drew on. Old Hannah came up-stairs to pull down the blinds, and as she advanced to the window he said to her, in a faint voice: "Well, Hannah, what news to-day?"

"Oh, nothing, sir," Hannah replied, looking out of the window with sad apathy, "only that there's a comet, they say."

"A what?" said the dying astronomer, starting up on his elbow.

"A comet—that' all, Master Swithin," repeated Hannah, in a lower voice, fearing she had done harm in some way.

"Well, tell me, tell me!" cried Swithin. "Is it Gambart's? Is it Charles the Fifth's, or Halley's, or Faye's, or whose?"

"Hush!" said she, thinking St. Cleeve slightly delirious again. "'Tis God A'might'ys, of course. I have n't seed em myself; but they say he's getting bigger every night, and that he'll be the biggest one known for fifty years when he's full growed. There, you must not talk any more now, or I'll go away."

Here was an amazing event, little noise as it had made in the happening. Of all phenomena that he had longed to witness during his short astronomical career, those appertaining to comets had excited him most. That the magnificent comet of 1811 would not return again for thirty centuries had been quite a permanent regret with him. And now, when the bottomless abyss of death seemed yawning beneath his feet, one of these much-desired apparitions, as large, apparently, as any of its tribe, had chosen to show itself.

"Oh, if I could but live to see that comet through my equatorial!" he cried.

Compared with comets, variable stars, which he had hitherto made his study, were, from their remoteness, uninteresting. They were to the former as Ujiji or Unyamwesi to the people of his own country. Attached to the solar system, these dazzling and perplexing rangers, the Byrons of firmamental celebrities, the facination of all astronomers, rendered themselves still more fascinating by the sinister suspicion attaching to them of being possibly the ultimate destroyers of the human race. In his physical prostration St. Cleeve wept bitterly at not being hale and strong enough to welcome with proper honor the new-come specimen of these desirable visitors.

The strenuous wish to live and behold the new phenomenon, supplanting the utter weariness of existence that he had heretofore experienced, lent him a new vitality. The crisis passed ; there was a turn for the better ; and after that he rapidly mended. The comet had in all probability saved his life. The limitless and complex wonders of the sky resumed their old power over his imagination ; the possibilities of that unfathomable blue ocean were endless ; finer feats than ever he would perform were to be achieved in its investigation. What Lady Constantine had said, that for one discovery made ten awaited making, was strikingly verified by the sudden appearance of this splendid marvel.

The windows of St. Cleeve's bedroom faced the west, and nothing would satisfy him but that his bed should be pulled round as to give him a view of the low sky, in which the as yet minute tadpole of fire was recognizable. The mere sight of it seemed to lend him sufficient resolution to complete his own cure forthwith. His only fear now was lest from some unexpected cause or other, the comet would vanish before he could get to the observatory on Ring's Hill Speer.

In his fervor to begin observing, he directed that an old telescope, which he had used in his first celestial attempts, should be tied at one end to the bedpost, and at the other fixed near his eye, as he reclined. Equipped only with this rough improvisation, he began to take notes. Lady Constantine was forgotten, till one day, suddenly, wondering if she knew of the important phenomenon, he revolved in his mind whether, as a fellow-student and sincere friend of his, she ought not to be sent for, and instructed in the use of the equatorial.

But though the image of Lady Constantine, in spite of her kindness and unmistakably warm heart, had been obscured in his mind by the heavenly body, she had not so readily forgotten him. Too shy to repeat her visit after so nearly betraying herself, she yet, every day, by the most ingenious and subtle means that could be devised by a woman who feared for her-

self, but could not refrain from tampering with danger, ascertained the state of her young friend's health. On hearing of the turn in his condition she rejoiced on his account, and became yet more despondent on her own. If he had died, she might have mused on him as her dear departed saint without much sin : but his return to life was a delight that bewildered and dismayed.

One evening, a little later on, he was sitting at his bedroom window, as usual, waiting for a sufficient decline of light to reveal the comet's form, when he beheld, crossing the field contiguous to the house, a figure which he knew to be hers. He thought she must be coming to see him on the grand comet question, to discuss which with so delightful and kind a comrade was an expectation full of pleasure. Hence he keenly observed her approach, till something happened that surprised him. When, at the descent of the hill, she reached the stile that admitted to Mrs. Martin's garden, Lady Constantine stood quite still for a minute or more. Instead of coming on to the house she went heavily and slowly back, almost as if in pain; and at length, quickening her pace, she was soon out of sight. She appeared in the path no more that day.

CHAPTER XI.

WHY had Lady Constantine stopped and turned? A misgiving had taken sudden possession of her. Her true sentiment towards St. Cleeve was too recognizable to herself to be tolerated.

That she had a legitimate interest in him as a young astronomer was true ; that her sympathy on account of his severe illness had been natural and commendable was also true. But the superfluous feeling was what filled her with trepidation. Superfluities have been defined as things you cannot do without, and this particular emotion, that came not within her

rightful measure, was just such a superfluity with her. In short, she felt there and then that to see St. Cleeve again would be dangerous; and by a violent effort she retreated from his precincts, as he had observed.

She resolved to ennoble her conduct from that moment of her life onwards. She would exercise kind patronage towards Swithin without once indulging herself with his company. Inexpressibly dear to her deserted heart he was becoming, but for the future he should at least be hidden from her eyes. To speak plainly, it was growing a serious question whether, if he were not hidden from her eyes, she would not soon be across the ragged boundary which divides the permissible from the forbidden.

By the time she drew near home the sun was going down. The heavy and handsome church, now subdued by violet shadow, except where its upper courses caught the western stroke of flame-color, stood close to her grounds, though the village of which it formerly was the nucleus had become quite depopulated, its cottages having been demolished to enlarge the park, leaving the old building to stand there alone, like a standard without an army. It was Friday night, and she heard the organist practicing voluntaries within. The hour, the notes, the even-song of the birds, and her own previous emotions combined to influence her devotionally; she entered, turning to the right and passing under the chancel arch, where she sat down and viewed the whole empty length, east and west. The semi-Norman arches of the nave, with their multitudinous notchings, were still visible by the light from the tower window; but the lower portion of the building was in obscurity, except where the feeble glimmer from the candle of the organist spread a glow-worm radiance around. The player, who was Miss Tabitha Lark, continued without intermission to produce her wandering sounds, unconscious of any one's presence except that of the youthful blower at her side.

The rays from the organist's candle illuminated but one small fragment of the chancel outside the pre-

cincts of the instrument, and that was the portion of the eastern wall whereon the ten commandments were inscribed. The gilt letters shone sternly into Lady Constantine's eyes; and she, being as impressionable as a turtle-dove, watched one of those commandments on the second table, till its thunder broke her spirit with blank contrition.

She knelt down, and did her utmost to eradicate those impulses toward St. Cleeve which were inconsistent with her position as the wife of an absent man, though not unnatural in her as his victim.

She knelt till she seemed scarcely to belong to the time she lived in, which lost the magnitude that the nearness of its perspective lent it on ordinary occasions, and took its natural rank with the other centuries. Having once got out of herself, she was calmer, and went on to register a magnanimous vow. She would look about for some maiden fit and likely to make St. Cleeve happy; and this girl she would endow with what money she could afford, that the natural result of their apposition should do him no worldly harm. The interest of her (Lady Constantine's) life should be in watching the development of love between Swithin and the ideal maiden.

The very painfulness of the scheme to her susceptible heart made it pleasing to her conscience; and she wondered that she had not before this time thought of a stratagem which united the possibility of benefiting the astronomer with the advantage of guarding against peril to both Swithin and herself. By providing for him a suitable helpmate she would preclude the dangerous awakening in him of sentiments reciprocating her own. Arrived at a point of exquisite misery through this heroic intention, Lady Constantine's tears moistened the books upon which her forehead was bowed. And as she heard her feverish heart throb against the desk, she firmly believed the wearing impulses of that heart would put an end to her sad life, and momentarily recalled the banished image of St. Cleeve to apostrophize him in a paraphrase of the poet's quaint lines—

"Dear love, press thy hand to my breast, and tell
If thou tracest the knocks in that narrow cell:
A carpenter dwells there; cunning is he,
And slyly he's shaping a coffin for me.

"He hammers and knocks by night and by day;
My repose he has utterly banished away.
O carpenter—carpenter, prithee work fast,
That I in still silence may slumber at last."

Lady Constantine was disturbed by a break in the organist's meandering practice, and raising her head she saw a person standing by the player. It was Mr. Torkingham, and what he said was distinctly audible He was inquiring for herself.

"I thought I saw Lady Constantine walk this way," he rejoined to Tabitha's negative. "I am very anxious indeed to meet with her."

She went forward. "I am here," she said. "Don't stop playing, Miss Lark. What is it, Mr. Torkingham?"

Tabitha thereupon resumed her playing, and Mr. Torkingham joined Lady Constantine.

"I have some very serious intelligence to break to your ladyship," he said. "But—I will not interrupt you here." (He had seen her rise from her knees to come to him.) "I will call at the house the first moment you can receive me, after reaching home."

"No, tell me here," she said, reseating herself.

He came close, and placed his hand on the poppy-head of the seat. "I have received a telegram," he resumed, haltingly, "in which I am requested to prepare you for the contents of a letter that you will receive to-morrow morning."

"I am quite ready."

"The subject is briefly this, Lady Constantine: that you have been a widow for more than eighteen months."

"Dead!"

"Yes. Sir Blount was attacked by dysentery and malarious fever, on the banks of the Zonga in South Africa, so long ago as last October twelvemonths, and it carried him off. Of the three men who were with him, two succumbed to the same illness, a hundred

miles further on; while the third, retracing his steps into a healthier district, remained there with a native tribe, and took no pains to make the circumstances known. It seems to be only by the mere accident of his having told some third party that we know of the matter now. This is all I can tell you at present."

She was greatly agitated for a few moments; and the Table of the Law opposite glistened indistinctly upon a vision still obscured by the old tears, which now seemed to appertain to another dispensation.

"Shall I conduct you home?" asked the parson.

"No, thank you," said Lady Constantine. "I would rather go alone."

CHAPTER XII.

ON the afternoon of the next day Mr. Torkingham, who occasionally dropped in to see St. Cleeve, called again as usual, and after duly remarking on the state of the weather, congratulating him on his sure though slow improvement, and answering his inquiries about the comet, said: "You have heard, I suppose, of what has happened to Lady Constantine?"

"No. Good heavens! Nothing serious?"

"Yes, it is serious." The parson informed him of the death of Sir Blount, and of the accidents which had hindered all knowledge of the same—accidents favored by the estrangement of the pair, and the lack of correspondence between them for some time.

His listener received the news with the concern of a friend, Lady Constantine's aspect in his eyes depending but little on her condition matrimonially.

"There was no attempt to bring him home when he died?"

"Oh, no. The climate necessitates instant burial. We shall have more particulars in a day or two, doubtless."

"Poor Lady Constantine—so good and so emo-

tional as she is! I suppose she is quite prostrated by the bad news."

"Well, she is rather serious—not prostrated. The household is going into mourning."

"Ah, no. she would not be quite prostrated," murmured Swithin, recollecting himself. "He was unkind to her in many ways. Do you think she will go away from Welland?"

That the vicar could not tell. But he feared that Sir Blount's affairs had been in a seriously involved condition, which might necessitate many unexpected changes.

Time showed that Mr. Torkingham's surmises were correct. During the long weeks of early summer, through which the young man still lay imprisoned, if not within his own chamber, within the limits of the house and garden, news reached him that Sir Blount's mismanagement and eccentric behavior were resulting in serious consequences to Lady Constantine; nothing less, indeed, than her almost complete impoverishment. His personality was swallowed up in paying his debts, and the Welland estate was so heavily charged with annuities to his distant relatives that only a mere pittance was left for her. She was reducing the establishment to the narrowest compass compatible with decent gentility. The horses were sold one by one; the greater part of the house was shut up, and she resided in the smallest rooms. All that was allowed to remain of her former contingent of male servants were an old man and a boy. Instead of using a carriage, she drove about in a donkey-chair, the said boy walking in front to clear the way and keep the animal in motion; while she wore, so his informants reported, not an ordinary widow's cap or bonnet, but something even plainer, the black material being drawn tightly round her face, giving her features a small, demure, devout cast, very pleasing to the eye.

"Now what's the most curious thing in this, Mr. San Cleeve," said Sammy Blore, who, in calling to inquire after Swithin's health, had imparted some of the above particulars, "is that my lady seems not to mind

being a pore woman half so much as we do at seeing her so. 'Tis a wonderful gift, Mr. San Cleeve, to be able to guide yerself, and not let loose yer soul at such a misfortune. I should go and drink neat if it had happened to me; but my lady's plan is best, though I only know such practice by hearsay, to be sure, for I never had nothing to lose."

Meanwhile the observatory was not forgotten; nor that visitant of singular shape and habits, which had appeared in the sky from no one knew whither, trailing its luminous streamer, and proceeding on its way in the face of a wondering world, till it should choose to vanish as suddenly as it had come. When, about a month after the above dialogue took place, Swithin was allowed to go about as usual, his first pilgrimage was to the Rings-Hill Speer. Here he studied at leisure what he had come to see.

On his return to the homestead, just after sunset, he found his grandmother and Hannah in a state of great concern. The former was looking out for him against the evening lights, her face showing itself worn and rutted like an old highway by the passing of many days. Her information was that in his absence Lady Constantine had called in her driving-chair, to inquire for him. Her ladyship had wished to observe the comet through the great telescope, but had found the door locked when she applied at the tower. Would he kindly leave the door unfastened to-morrow, she had asked, that she might be able to go to the column on the following evening, for the same purpose? She did not require him to attend.

During the next day he sent Hannah with the key to Welland House, not caring to leave the tower open. As evening advanced and the comet grew distinct, he doubted if Lady Constantine could handle the telescope alone with any pleasure or profit to herself. Unable, as a devotee to science, to rest under this misgiving, he crossed the field in the furrow that he had used ever since the corn was sown, and entered the plantation. His unpracticed mind never once guessed that her stipulations against his coming might have arisen

from a sense that such meetings had already been too frequent to bear repetition with propriety, innocent as they had been in fact and intent.

On ascending he found her already there. She sat in the observing-chair: the warm light from the west, which flowed in through the opening of the dome, brightening her face, and her face only, her robes of sable lawn rendering the remainder of her figure almost invisible.

"You have come!" she said, with some dismay. "I did not require you. But no matter." She extended her hand cordially to him.

Before speaking he looked at her with a great new interest in his eye. It was the first time that he had seen her thus, and she was altered in more than dress.

"Have you nothing to say?" she continued. "Your footsteps were audible to me from the very bottom, and I knew they were yours. You look almost restored."

"I am almost restored," he replied, respectfully pressing her hand. "A reason for living arose, and I lived."

"What reason?" she quickly inquired.

He pointed to the rocket-like object in the western sky. His eyes then returned to her face, whose soberly-sweet expression was of a rare and peculiar kind, —something that he had never seen before in woman.

"You mean the comet? Well, you will never make a courtier! You know, of course, what has happened to me. Have you also heard that I am now quite a poor woman? Tell me what you think of it."

"I have thought very little of it, since I heard that you seemed to mind it but little. There is even this good in it, that I now may be able to show you some little kindness for all those you have done me, my dear lady."

"Unless, for economy's sake, I go and live abroad, —at Dinan, Versailles, or Boulogne."

Swithin, who had never thought of such a contingency, was earnest in his regrets; without, however, showing more than a sincere friend's disappointment.

"I did not say it was absolutely necessary,' she continued. "I have, in fact, grown so homely and home-loving, I am so interested in the place and the people here, that, in spite of advice, I have almost determined not to let the house ; but to continue the less business-like but pleasanter alternative of living humbly in a part of it, and shutting up the rest."

"Your love of astronomy is getting as strong as mine!" he said, ardently. "You could not tear yourself away from the observatory."

"You might have supposed me capable of a little human feeling as well as scientific, in connection with the observatory."

"Dear Lady Constantine, by admitting that your astronomer has also a part of your interest——"

"Ah, you did not find it out without my telling!" she said, with a playfulness which was scarcely playful, a slight accession of pinkness being visible in her face. "I diminish myself in your esteem by reminding you."

"You might do anything in this world without diminishing yourself in my esteem, after the goodness you have shown. And more than that, no misrepresentation, no rumor, no damning appearance whatever, would ever shake my loyalty to you."

"But you put a very matter-of-fact construction on my motives, sometimes. You see me in such a hard light that I have to drop hints in quite a maneuvering manner to let you know I am as sympathetic as other people. I sometimes think you would rather have me die than have your equatorial stolen. Confess that your admiration for me was based on my house and position in the county! Now I am shorn of all that glory, such as it was, and am a widow, and am poorer than my tenants, and can no longer buy telescopes, and am unable, from the narrowness of my circumstances, to mix in circles that people formerly said I adorned, I fear I have lost the little hold I once had over you."

"You are as unjust now as you have been generous hitherto," said St. Cleeve, with tears in his eyes at the

gentle banter of the lady, which he, poor innocent, read as her real opinions. Seizing her hand, he continued, in tones between reproach and anger: "I swear to you that I have but two devotions, two thoughts, two hopes, and two blessings in this world, and that one of them is yourself!"

"And the other?"

"The pursuit of astronomy."

"And astronomy stands first."

"I have never ordinated two such dissimilar ideas. And why should you deplore your altered circumstances, my dear lady? Your widowhood, if I may take the liberty to speak on such a subject, is, though I suppose a sadness, not perhaps an unmixed evil. For though your pecuniary troubles have been discovered to the world and yourself thereby, your happiness in marriage was, as you have generously confided to me, not great; and you are now left free as a bird to follow your own hobbies."

"I wonder you recognize that."

"But perhaps," he added, with a sigh of regret, "you will again fall a prey to some man, some uninteresting country 'squire or other, and be lost to the scientific world after all."

"If I fall a prey to any man, it will not be a country 'squire. But don't go on with this, for Heaven's sake! You may think what you like in silence."

"We are forgetting the comet," said St. Cleeve. He turned, and set the instrument in order for observation, and wheeled round the dome. While they were looking at the nucleus of the fiery plume, that now filled so large a space of the sky as completely to dominate it, Swithin dropped his gaze upon the field, and beheld in the dying light a number of laborers crossing it directly towards the column.

"What do you see?" Lady Constantine asked, without ceasing to observe the comet.

"Some of the work-folk are coming this way. I know what they are coming for—I promised to let them look at the comet through the glass."

"They must not come up here," she said, decisively.

"They shall await your time."

"I have a special reason for wishing them not to see me here. If you ask why, I can tell you. They mistakenly suspect my interest to be less in astronomy than in the astronomer, and they must have no showing for such a wild notion. What can you do to keep them out?"

"I'll lock the door," said Swithin. "They will then think I am away."

He ran down the staircase, and she could hear him hastily turning the key. Lady Constantine sighed.

"What weakness, what weakness!" she said to herself. "That envied power of self-control—where is it? That power of concealment which a woman should have—where? To run such risks, to come here alone—oh, if it were known! But I was always so—always!"

She jumped up, and followed him down-stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE was standing immediately inside the door at the bottom, though it was so dark she could hardly see him. The villagers were audibly talking without.

"He's sure to come, sooner or later," resounded up the spiral in the voice of Hezzy Biles. "He wouldn't let such a fine show as the comet makes to-night go by without peeping at it—not Master Cleeve! Did ye bring along the flagon, Haymoss? Then we will sit down inside the hut here and wait. He'll come afore bed-time. Why, his spy-glass will stretch out that there comet as long as Welland Lane."

"I'd as soon miss the great peep-show that comes every year to Greenhill Fair as a sight of such a immortal spectacle as this!"

"'Immortal spectacle'—where did ye get that choice morsel, Haymoss?" inquired Sammy Blore "Well, well, the Lord save the simple. But, as 't i'

so dark in the hut, suppose we draw out the bench into the front here, souls?"

The bench was accordingly brought forth, and in order to have a back to lean against they placed it exactly across the door into the spiral staircase. "Now, have ye got any backer? If ye have n't, I have," continued Sammy Blore. A striking of matches followed, and the speaker concluded comfortably; "Now we shall do very well."

"And what do this comet mean?" asked Haymoss. "That some great tumult is going to happen, or that we shall die of a famine?"

"Famine?—no," said Nat Chapman. "That only touches such as we, and God only concerns himself wi' his upper creatures. It is n't to be supposed that a strange fiery lantern like that would be lighted up for folks with ten or a dozen shillings a week and their gristing, and a load o' thorn fagots when we can get 'em. If 't is a signal to mend the ways of anybody in this parish, 't is to my Lady Constantine, since she is the only one with feelings worth such a hint."

"As for her income—that she's now lost."

"Ah, well; I don't take in all I hear."

Lady Constantine drew close to St. Cleeve's side, and whispered, trembling: "Do you think they will wait long? Or can we get out?"

Swithin felt the awkwardness of the situation. The men had stupidly placed the bench close to the door, which, owing to the stairs within, opened outwards; so that, at the first push by the pair inside to release themselves, the bench must have gone over, and sent the smokers sprawling on their faces. He whispered to her to ascend the column and wait till he came.

"And have the dead man left her nothing? And have he carried his into 's grave? And will his skeleton lie warm on account o' t? Hee-hee!" said Haymoss.

"'T is all swallered up," observed Hezzy Biles. "His going-on made her miserable till 'a died, and if I were the woman I'd have my antics now. He ought

to have bequeathed to her this young gentleman, Mr. St. Cleeve, as some sort of amends. I'd up and marry him if I were she; since her downfall has brought 'em quite near together, and made him as good as she in rank, as he was afore in bone and breeding."

"D'ye think she will?" asked Sammy Blore. "Or is she intending virginity for the rest of her days?"

"I don't want to be irreverent to her ladyship; but I really don't think she is intending any such desperate martyring of herself. I say she's rather intending to commit lawful matrimony with somebody or other, and one young gentleman in particular."

"But the young man himself?"

"Planned, cut out, and finished for the delight of woman!"

"Yet he must be willing."

"That would soon come. If they get up this tower ruling plannards together much longer, their plannards will soon rule them together, in my way of thinking. If she 've a disposition toward the knot, she can soon teach him."

"True, true, and lawfully. What before might ha' been a wrong desire is now a holy wish."

The scales fell from Swithin St. Cleeve's eyes as he heard the words of his neighbors. How suddenly the truth dawned upon him; how it bewildered him, till he scarcely knew where he was; how he recalled the full force of what he had only half apprehended at earlier times—these vivid things are difficult to tell in slow verbiage. He could remain there no longer, and with an electrified heart he retreated up the spiral. He found Lady Constantine half-way to the top, standing by a loop-hole, and when she spoke he discovered that she was almost in tears. "Are they gone?" she asked.

"I fear they will not go yet," he replied, with a nervous fluctuation of manner that had never before appeared in his bearings towards her.

"What shall I do?" she asked. "I ought not to be

here; nobody knows that I am out of the house. Oh, this is a mistake! I must go home somehow."

"Did you hear what they were saying?"

"No," said she. "What is the matter? Surely you are trembling. What did they say?"

"It would be the exaggeration of frankness in me to tell you."

"Is it what a woman ought not to be made acquainted with?"

"It is, in this case. It is so new and indescribable an idea to me—that——" He leaned against the concave wall, quite tremulous with strange, incipient sentiments.

"What sort of an idea?" she asked, gently.

"It is—an awakening. In thinking of the heaven above, I did not perceive—the——"

"Earth beneath?"

"The other heaven beneath. Pray, dear Lady Constantine, give me your hand for a moment!"

She seemed startled, and the hand was not given. "I am so anxious to get home," she repeated. "I did not mean to stay here more than five minutes."

"I fear I am much to blame for this accident," he said. "I ought not to have intruded here. But don't grieve! I will arrange for your escape, somehow. Be good enough to follow me down."

They redescended, and, whispering to Lady Constantine to remain a few stairs behind, he began to rattle and unlock the door. The men precipitately removed their bench, and Swithin stepped out, the light being still enough to enable them to distinguish him.

"Well, Hezekiah, and Samuel, and Nat, how are you?" he said, boldly.

"Well, sir, 't is much as before with me," replied Nat. "One hour a week with God and the rest with the devil, as a man may say. And really, now yer poor father's gone, I'd as lief that Sunday hour should go like the rest; for Pa'son Tarkenham do tease a feller's conscience that much that church is no holler-day at all to the limbs, as it was in yer reverent

father's time. But we've been waiting here, Mr. San Cleeve, supposing ye had not come."

"I have been sitting at the top, and fastened the door not to be disturbed. Now I am sorry to disappoint you, but I have another engagement this evening, so that it would be inconvenient to admit you. To-morrow evening, or any evening but this, I will show you the comet and any stars you like."

They readily agreed to come the next night, and prepared to depart. But what with the flagon and the pipes and the final observations, getting away was a matter of time. Meanwhile, a cloud, which nobody had noticed, had arisen from the north overhead, and large drops of rain began to fall so rapidly that the conclave entered the hut till it should be over. St. Cleeve strolled off under the firs. The next moment there was a rustling through the trees at another point, and a man and a woman appeared. The woman took shelter under a tree, and the man, bearing wraps and umbrellas, came forward.

"My lady's man and maid," said Sammy.

"Is her ladyship here?" asked the man.

"Her ladyship keeps more kissable company," replied Nat Chapman.

"Hush!" said Blore.

"Not here? Well, to be sure! We can't find her anywhere in the wide house! I've been sent to look for her with these overclothes and umbrella. I've suffered horse-flesh traipsing up and down, and can't find her nowhere. Lord, Lord, where can she be, and two months' wages owing me."

"Why so anxious, Anthony Green, as I think your name is shaped? You be not a married man?" said Hezzy.

"'Tis what they call me, neighbors, whether or no."

"But surely you was a bachelor chap by late, afore her ladyship got rid of the regular servants and took ye?"

"I were; but that's past."

"And how came ye to bow yer head to't, Anthony?

'T is what you never was inclined to. You was by no means a doting man in my time."

"Well, had I been left to my own free choice, 'tis as like as not I should ha' shunned forming such kindred, being at that time a poor day man, or weekly, at my highest luck in hiring. But 't is wearing work to hold out against common usage, and the woman wanting ye to stand by her and save her from unborn shame; so, since custom would have it, I let myself be carried away by opinion, and took her. Though she's never once thanked me for covering her confusion, that's true. Well, well, 't is the way of God's creatures, as a man may say, and I don't complain. Here she is, just behind, under the tree, if you'd like to see her. Well, well, where can my Lady be? And I the trusty jineral man—'t is more than my place is worth to lose her! Come forward, Christiana, and talk to the gentlemen."

While the woman was talking, the rain increased so much that they all retreated further into the hut. St. Cleeve, who had so impatiently stood a little way off, now saw his opportunity, and putting in his head, said: "The rain beats in; you had better shut the door. I must ascend and close up the dome." Slamming the door upon them without ceremony, he quickly went to poor Lady Constantine in the column, and telling her she could pass them unseen gave her his arm; thus he conducted her across the front of the hut into the shadows of the firs.

"I will run to the house and harness your little carriage myself," he said, tenderly. "I will then take you home in it."

"No; please don't leave me here alone under these dismal trees." Neither would she hear of his getting her any wraps; and, opening her little sunshade to keep the rain out of her face, she walked with him across the insulating field, after which the trees of the park afforded her a sufficient shelter to reach home without much damage. Swithin was too greatly affected by what he had overheard, to speak much to her on the way, and protected her as if she had been a

shorn lamb. After a farewell which had more meaning than sound in it, he hastened back to Rings-Hill Speer. The workfolks were still in the hut, and by dint of friendly converse and a sip at the flagon had so cheered Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Green that they neither thought nor cared what had become of Lady Constantine.

St. Cleeve's sudden sense of new reactions with that sweet patroness had taken away in one half-hour his natural ingenuousness. Henceforth he could act a part.

"I have all secure at the top," he said, putting his head into the hut. "I am now going home. When the rain ceases, lock this door and bring the key to my house."

CHAPTER XIV.

RURAL solitude, which provides ample themes for the intellect and sweet occupations innumerable for the minor sentiments, affords no normal channel for those stronger passions that enter no less than the others into the complicated stream of human consciousness. The suspended pathos finds its remedy in crystallizing on the first intrusive object that happens to be reasonably well organized for the purpose, regardless of reasonable accessories. Where the solitude is shadowed by the secret melancholies of the solitary, this process is still surer in operation.

The labored resistance which Lady Constantine's judgment had offered to her rebellious affection ere she learned that she was a widow, and which had taken the form of sharp remorse, became now an inward bashfulness, that rendered her even more unstable of mood than she was before. However, having discovered herself to love this handsome youth of intellectual promise, she was one of that mettle, fervid, cordial, and spontaneous, who would rather see all her affairs going to rack and ruin than abjure a tender faith in anybody to repair. But they had already gone to rack

and ruin by no fault of hers, and had left her such a painfully narrowed existence as even lent something of rationality to her attachment. Thus it was that her restful and unambitious soul found comfort in her reverses.

As for St. Cleeve, the tardiness of his awakening was the natural result of his experience combined with devotion to his hobby. But, like a spring bud hard in bursting, the delay was compensated by after-speed. At once breathlessly recognizing in this fellow-watcher of the skies a handsome woman attached to him, in addition to the patroness and friend, he truly translated the nearly forgotten kiss she had given him in her moment of despair. The first word of self-communing about her in this aspect begot a second, and the second begot a third, and so on to the end of the chapter of development which makes up the growth of a love.

Lady Constantine, in being seven years his senior, was an object even better calculated to nourish a youth's first passion than any girl his own age, superiority of experience and ripeness of emotion exercising a peculiar fascination over young men in their first ventures in this kind.

The alchemy which thus transmuted an abstracted astronomer into an eager lover—alas, must it be said, spoilt a promising young physicist to produce a commonplace inamorato? —may be almost described as working its change in one short night. Next morning he was so fascinated with the new sensation that he wanted to rush off at once to Lady Constantine, and say: "I love you true!" in the intensest tones of that mental condition, so as to register his assertion in her heart before any of those accidents which "creep in 'twixt vows and change decrees of kings," should occur to hinder him. But his embarrasment at standing in a new position towards her would not allow him to present himself at her door in any such hurry. He waited on, as helplessly as a girl, for a chance of encountering her.

But though she had tacitly agreed to see him on any

reasonable occasion, Lady Constantine did not put herself in his way. Now that for the first time he had learned to feel a strong impatience for their meeting, her shyness for the first time led to delay it. But given two people living in one parish, who long from the depths of their hearts to be in each other's company, what resolves of modesty, policy, pride, or apprehension will keep them for any length of time apart? One afternoon he was watching the sun from his tower, and half echoing the Greek astronomer's wish that he might be set close to that luminary for the wonder of beholding it in all its glory, at the slight penalty of being utterly consumed the next instant. Glancing over the high-road between the field and the park (which sublunary features now too often distracted his attention from his telescope), he saw her passing along that way. She was seated in the donkey-carriage, that had now taken the place of her landau, the white animal looking no larger than a cat at that distance. The buttoned boy, who represented both coachman and footman, walked alongside the animal's head at a solemn pace; the dog stalked at the distance of a yard behind the vehicle, without indulging in a single gambol; and the whole turn-out resembled in dignity a dwarfed state procession.

Here was an excellent opportunity but for two obstructions: the boy, who might be curious; and the dog, who might bark and attract the attention of any laborers or servants near. Yet the risk was to be run, and, knowing that she would soon turn up a certain shady lane at right angles to the road she had followed, he ran hastily down the staircase, crossed the barley (which now covered the field) by the path not more than a foot wide which he had trodden for himself, and got into the lane at the other end. By slowly walking along it in the direction of the turnpike road he soon had the satisfaction of seeing her coming. To his surprise, he also had the additional satisfaction of perceiving that neither boy nor dog was in her company.

They both blushed as they approached, she from

sex, he from juvenility. One thing she seemed to see in a moment, that in the interval of her absence St. Cleeve had become a man; and as he greeted her with this new and maturer light in his eyes, she could not hide her embarassment or meet their fire.

"I have just sent my page across to the column with your book on Cometary Nuclei, that you might not come to the House for it. I did not know I should meet you here."

"Didn't you wish me to come to the House for it?"

"I did not, frankly. You know why, do you not?"

"Yes, I know. Well, my longing is at rest. I have met you again. But are you unwell, that you drive out in this chair?"

"No; I walked out this morning, and am a little tired."

"I have been looking for you night and day. Why do you turn your face aside? You used not to be so." Her hand rested on the side of the chair, and he took it. "Do you know that since we last met, I have been thinking of you—daring to think of you—as I never thought of you before?"

"Yes, I know it."

"How did you know?"

"I saw it in your face when you came up."

"Well, I suppose I ought not to think of you so. And yet, had I not learned to, I should never fully have felt how gent'e and sweet you are. Only think of my loss if I had lived and died without seeing more in you than in astronomy! But I shall never cease to do so now. When you talk I shall love your understanding; when you are silent I shall love your face. But how shall I know that you care to be so much to me?"

Her manner was disturbed as she recognized the impending self-surrender, which she knew not how to resist, and was not altogether at ease in welcoming.

"Oh, Lady Constantine," he continued, bending over her, "give me some proof more than mere seem-

ing and inference, which are all I have at present, that you don't think this I tell you of presumption in me! I have been unable to do anything since I last saw you for pondering uncertainly on this. Some proof, or little sign, that we are one in heart!"

A blush settled on her face; and half in effort, half in spontaneity, she put her finger on her cheek. He respectfully, almost devotionally, kissed the spot.

"Does that suffice?" she asked, scarcely giving her words voice.

"Yes; I am convinced."

"Then that must be the end. Let me drive on; the boy will be back again soon." She spoke hastily, and looked askance, to hide the heat of her cheek.

"No; the tower door is open, and he will go to the top, and waste his time in looking through the telescope."

"Then you should rush back, for he will do some damage."

"No; he may do what he likes, tinker and spoil the instrument, destroy my papers—anything, so that he will stay there and leave us alone."

She flushed with a species of pained pleasure. "You never used to feel like that!" she said, and there was keen self-reproach in her voice. "You were once so devoted to your science that the thought of an intruder into your temple would have driven you wild. Now you don't care; and who is to blame? Ah, not you, not you!"

The animal ambled on with her, and he, leaning on the side of the little vehicle, kept her company.

"Well, don't let us think of that," he said. "I offer myself and all my energies, frankly and entirely, to you, my dear, dear lady, whose I shall be always. But my words in telling you this will only injure my meaning, instead of emphasize it. In expressing, even to myself, my thoughts of you, I find that I fall into phrases which, as a critic, I should hitherto have heartily despised for their commonness. What's the use of saying, for instance, as I have just said, that I give myself entirely to you, and shall be yours always

—that you have my devotion, my highest homage? Those words have been used so frequently in a flippant manner that honest use of them is not distinguishable from the unreal." He turned to her, and added, smiling: "Your eyes are to be my stars for the future."

"Yes, I know it—I know it, and all you would say! I dreaded even while I hoped for this, my dear young friend," she replied, her eyes being full of tears. "I am injuring you; who knows that I am not injuring your future—I who ought to know better? Nothing can come of this—nothing must—and I am only wasting your time. Why have I drawn you off from a grand celestial study to study poor lonely me? Say you will never despise me, when you get older, for this episode in our lives. But you will—I know you will. All men do, when they have been attracted in their unsuspecting youth as I have attracted you. I ought to have kept my resolve."

"What was that?"

"To bear anything rather than draw you from your high purpose; to be like the noble citizen of old times, who, attending a sacrifice, let himself be burnt to the bone by a coal that jumped into his sleeve rather than disturb the sacred ceremony."

"But can I not study and love both?"

"I hope so—I earnestly hope so. But you'll be the first if you do, and I am the responsible one if you do not."

"You speak as if I were quite a child, and you immensely older. Why, how old do you think I am? I am twenty."

"You seem younger. Well, that's so much the better. That sounds strong and firm. How old do you think I am?"

"I have never thought of considering." He innocently turned to scrutinize her face. She winced a little. But the instinct was premature. Time had taken no liberties with her features as yet; nor had trouble very roughly handled her, to outward view.

"I will tell you," she replied, speaking almost with

physical pain, yet as if determination should carry her through. "I am six-and-twenty—nearly—I mean a little more—a few months more. Am I not a fearful deal older than you?"

"At first it seems a great deal," he answered, musing. "But it doesn't seem much when one gets used to it."

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "It *is* a good deal."

"Very well, then, sweetest Lady Constantine, let it be," he said, gently.

"You should not let it be! A polite man would have flatly contradicted me. . . . Oh, I am ashamed of this!" she added, a moment after, with a subdued, sad look upon the ground. "I am speaking by the card of the outer world, which I have left behind utterly: no such lip-service is known in your sphere. I care nothing for those things, really; but that which is called the Eve in us will out sometimes. Well, we will forget that now, as we must, at no very distant date, forget all the rest of this."

He walked beside her thoughtfully for a while, with his eyes also bent on the road. "Why must we forget it all?" he inquired.

"It is only an interlude."

"An interlude! It is no interlude to me. Oh, how can you talk so lightly of this, Lady Constantine? And yet, if I were to go away from here, I might, perhaps, soon reduce it to an interlude! Yes," he resumed, impulsively, "I will go away. Love dies, and it is just as well to strangle it in its birth; it can only die once! I'll go."

"No—no!" she said, looking up apprehensively. "I mislead you. It is no interlude to me—it is tragical. I only meant that from a worldly point of view it is an interlude, which we should try to forget. But the world is not all. You will not go away?"

But he continued, drearily: "Yes—yes, I see it all: you have enlightened me. It will be hurting your prospects even more than mine, if I stay. Now Sir Blount is dead, you are free again—may marry where you will, but for this fancy of ours. I'll leave Welland, before harm comes of my staying."

"Don't decide to do a thing so rash!" she begged, seizing his hand, and looking miserable at the effect of her words. "I shall have nobody left in the world to care for! And now I have given you the great telescope, and lent you the column, it would be ungrateful to go away! I was wrong; believe me that I did not mean that it was a mere interlude to *me*. Oh, if you only knew how very—very far it is from that! It is my doubt of the result to you that makes me speak so slightingly."

They were now approaching cross-roads, and casually looking up, they beheld, thirty or forty rods beyond the crossing, Mr. Torkingham, who was leaning over a gate, his back being toward them. As yet he had not recognized their approach.

The master passion had already supplanted St. Cleeve's natural ingenuousness by subtlety.

"Would it be well for us to see Mr. Torkingham just now?" he began.

"Certainly not," she said, hastily, and pulling the rein she instantly drove down the right-hand road. "I cannot meet anybody!" she murmured. "Would it not be better that you leave me now?—not for my pleasure, but that there may arise no distressing tales about us before we know—how to act in this—this—" (she smiled faintly) "heart-aching extremity."

They were passing under a huge oak tree, whose limbs, irregular with shoulders, knuckles, and elbows, stretched horizontally over the lane in a manner recalling Absalom's death. A slight rustling was perceptible amid the leafage as they drew out from beneath it, and, turning up his eyes, Swithin saw that very buttoned page, whose advent they had dreaded, looking down with interest at them from a perch not much higher than a yard above their heads. He had a bunch of oak-apples in his hand, plainly the object of his climb, and was furtively watching Lady Constantine, with the hope that she might not see him. But that she had already done, though she did not reveal it, and, fearing that the latter words of their

conversation had been overheard, they spoke not till they had passed the next turning.

She stretched out her hand to his. "This must not go on," she said, imploringly. "My anxiety as to what may be said of such methods of meeting makes me too unhappy. See what has happened!" She could not help smiling. "Out of the frying-pan into the fire! After meanly turning to avoid the parson, we have rushed into a worse publicity. It is too humiliating to have to avoid people, and lowers both you and me. The only remedy is not to meet."

"Very well," said Swithin, with a sigh. "So it shall be."

And with smiles that might as well have been tears, they parted there and then.

CHAPTER XV.

THE summer passed away, and autumn, with its infinite succession of tints, came creeping on. Darker grew the evenings, tearfuller the moonlights, and heavier the dews. Meanwhile the comet had waxed to its largest dimensions—so large that not only the nucleus but a portion of the tail had been visible in broad day. It was now on the wane, though every night the equatorial still afforded an opportunity of observing the singular object, which would soon disappear altogether from the heavens for perhaps thousands of years.

But the astronomer of the Rings-Hill Speer was no longer a match for his celestial materials. Scientifically he had become but a dim vapor of himself; the lover had come into him like an armed man, and cast out the student, and his intellectual situation was growing a life-and-death matter.

The resolve of the pair had been so far kept; they had not seen each other in private for three months. But on one day in October he ventured to write a note to her:

"I can do nothing. I have ceased to study, ceased to observe. The equatorial is useless to me. This affection I have for you absorbs my life, and outweighs my intentions. The power to labor in this grandest of fields has left me. I struggle against the weakness till I think of the cause, and then I bless her. But the very desperation of my circumstances has suggested a remedy; and this I would inform you of at once.

"Can you come to me, since I must not come to you? I will wait to-morrow night at the edge of the plantation by which you would enter to the column. I will not detain you; my plan can be told in ten words."

The night after posting this missive to her he waited at the spot mentioned. It was a melancholy evening for coming abroad. A blusterous wind had risen during the day, and still continued to increase. Yet he stood watchful in the darkness, and was ultimately rewarded by discerning a shady, muffled shape that embodied itself from the field, accompanied by the scratching of silk over stubble. There was no longer any disguise as to the nature of their meeting. It was a lover's assignation, pure and simple; and boldly realizing it as such, he clasped her in his arms.

"I cannot bear this any longer!" he exclaimed. "Three months since I saw you alone! Only a glimpse of you in church, or a bow from the distance, in all that time! What a fearful struggle this keeping apart has been!"

"Yet I would have had strength to persist, since it seemed best," she murmured, when she could speak, "had not your words on your condition so alarmed and saddened me. This inability of yours to work, or study, or observe,—it is terrible! So terrible a sting is it to my conscience that your words about a remedy have brought me instantly."

"Yet I don't altogether mind it, since it is you, my dear lady, who have displaced the work: and yet the

loss of time nearly distracts me, when I have neither the power to work nor the delight of your company."

"But your remedy! Oh, I cannot help guessing it! Yes, you are going away!"

"Let us ascend the column; we can speak more at ease there. Then I will explain all. I would not ask you to climb so high, but the hut is not yet furnished."

He entered the cabin at the foot, and, having lighted a small lantern, conducted her up the hollow staircase to the top, where he closed the slides of the dome to keep out the wind, and placed the observing-chair for her.

"I can stay only five minutes," she said, without sitting down. "You said it was important that you should see me, and I have come. I assure you it is at a great risk. If I am seen here at this time I am ruined forever. But what would I not do for you? Oh, Swithin, your remedy—is it to go away? There is no other; and yet I dread that like death!"

"I can tell you in a moment, but I must begin at the beginning. All this ruinous idleness and distraction is caused by the misery of our not being able to meet with freedom. The fear that something may snatch you from me keeps me in a state of perpetual apprehension."

"It is too true also of me. I dread that some accident may happen, and waste my days in meeting the trouble half-way."

"So our lives go on, and our labors stand still. Now for the remedy. Dear Lady Constantine, allow me to marry you."

She started, and the wind without shook the building, sending up a yet intenser moan from the firs.

"I mean, marry you quite privately. Let it make no difference whatever to our outward lives for years, for I know that in my present position you could not possibly acknowledge me as a husband publicly. But by marrying at once we secure the certainty that we cannot be divided by accident, coaxing, or artifice; and

at ease on that point, I shall embrace my studies with the old vigor, and you yours."

Lady Constantine was so agitated at the unexpected boldness of such a proposal from one hitherto so boyish and deferential that she sank into the observing-chair, her intention to remain for only a few minutes being quite forgotton.

She covered her face with her hands. "No, no—I dare not!" she whispered.

"But is there a single thing else left to do?" he pleaded kneeling down beside her, less in supplication than in abandonment. "What else can we do?"

"Wait till you are famous"

"But I cannot be famous unless I strive, and this distracting condition prevents all striving."

"Could you not strive on if I—give you a promise, a solemn promise, to be yours when your name is fairly well known?"

St. Cleeve breathed heavily. "It will be a long, weary time," he said. "And even with your promise I shall work but half-heartedly. Every hour of study will be interrupted with: 'Suppose this or that happen;' Suppose somebody persuades her to break her promise;' worse still: 'Suppose some rival maligns me, and so seduces her away.' No, Lady Constantine, dearest, best, as you are, that element of distraction would still remain, and where that is, no sustained energy is possible. Many erroneous things have been written and said by the sages, but never did they float a greater fallacy than that an ardent love serves as a stimulus to win the loved one by patient toil."

"I cannot argue with you," she said, weakly.

"My only other chance would lie in going away," he resumed, after a moment's reflection, with his eyes on the lantern flame, which waved and smoked in the currents of air that leaked into the dome from the fierce wind-stream without. "If I might—take away the equatorial, supposing it possible that I could find some suitable place for observing in the southern hemisphere—say at the Cape—I *might* be able to apply myself to serious work again, after the lapse of a little

time. The southern constellations offer a less exhausted field for investigation. I wonder if I might!"

"You mean," she answered, uneasily, "that you might apply yourself to work when your recollection of me began to fade, and my life to become a matter of indifference to you. . . . Yes, go! No—I cannot bear it! The remedy is worse than the disease. I cannot let you go away!"

"Then how can you refuse the only condition on which I can stay, without ruin to my purpose and scandal to your name? Dearest, agree to my proposal, as you love both me and yourself!"

He waited, while the fir-trees rubbed and prodded the base of the tower, and the wind roared around and shook it; but she could not find words to reply.

"Would to God," he burst out, "that I might perish here, like Winstanley in his lighthouse! Then the difficulty would be solved for you."

"You are so wrong, so very wrong, in saying so!" she exclaimed, passionately. "You may doubt my wisdom, pity my short-sightedness; but there is one thing you do know—that I love you dearly!"

"You do—I know it!" he said, softened in a moment. "But it seems such a simple remedy for the difficulty that I cannot see how you can mind adopting it, if you care as much for me as I do for you."

"Should we live—just as we are, exactly—supposing I agreed?" she faintly inquired.

"Yes, that is my idea."

"Quite privately, you say. How could—the marriage be quite private?"

"I would go away to London and get a license. Then you could come to me, and return again immediately after the ceremony. I could return at leisure, and not a soul in the world would know what had taken place. Think, dearest, with what a free conscience you could then assist me in my efforts to plumb these deeps above us! Any feeling that you may now have against clandestine meetings as such would then be removed, and our hearts would then be at rest."

There was a certain scientific practicability even in his love-making, and it here came out excellently. But she sat on with suspended breath, her heart wildly beating, while he waited in open-mouthed expectation. Each was swayed by the emotion within them, much as the candle flame was swayed by the tempest without. It was the most critical evening of their lives. The pale rays of the little lantern fell upon her emotional face, snugly and neatly bound in her black bonnet, but not a beam leaked out to suggest to any watchful eye that human life at its highest excitement might be beating within that dark and isolated tower; for the dome had no windows, and every shutter that afforded an opening for the telescope was hermetically closed. Predilections and misgivings so equally strove within her still youthful breast that she could not utter a word; her intention wheeled this way and that like the balance of a watch. His unexpected proposition had brought about the smartest encounter of inclination with prudence, of impulse with reserve, that she had ever known.

Of all the reasons that she had expected him to give for his urgent request to see her this evening, an offer of marriage was probably the last. Whether or not she had ever amused herself with hypothetical fancies on such a subject,—and it was only natural that she should vaguely have done so,—the courage in her *protege* coolly to advance it, without a hint from herself that such a proposal would be tolerated, showed her that there was more in his character than she had reckoned on; and the discovery almost frightened her. The humor, attitude, and tenor of her attachment had been of quite an unpremeditated quality, unsuggestive of any such audacious solution to their distress as this.

"I repeat my question, dearest," he said, after her long pause. "Shall it be done? Or shall I exile myself, and study as best I can, in some distant country, out of sight and sound?"

"Are those the only alternatives? Yes, yes; I suppose they are!" She waited yet another moment, bent

over his kneeling figure, and kissed his forehead. "Yes; it shall be done," she whispered. "I will marry you."

"My angel, I am content!"

"I am weaker than you,—far the weaker," she went on, her tears falling. "Rather than lose you out of my sight I will marry without stipulation or condition. But—I put it to your kindness—grant me one little request."

He instantly assented.

"It is that, in consideration of my peculiar position in this county,—oh, you can't understand it!—you will not put an end to the absolute secrecy of our relationship without my full assent. Also, that you will never come to Welland House without first discussing with me the advisability of the visit, accepting my opinion on the point. There, see how a timid woman tries to fence herself in!"

"My dear lady-love, neither of those two high-handed courses should I have taken, even had you not stipulated against them. The very essence of our marriage plan is that those two conditions are kept. I see as well as you do, even more than you, how important it is that for the present—more, for a long time hence—I should still be but the curate's lonely son, unattached to anybody or anything, with no object of interest but his science; and you the recluse lady of the manor, to whom he is only an acquaintance."

"See what deceits love sows in honest minds!"

"It would be a humiliation to you at present that I could not bear if a marriage between us were made public; an inconvenience without any compensating advantage."

"I am so glad you assume it without my setting it before you! Now I know you are not only good and true, but politic and trustworthy."

"Well, then, here is our covenant. My lady swears to marry me; I, in return for such great courtesy, swear never to compromise her by intruding at Welland House, and to keep the marriage concealed till I have won a position worthy of her."

"Or till I request it to be made known," she added, possibly foreseeing a contingency which had not occurred to him.

"Or till you request it," he repeated.

"It is agreed," murmured Lady Constantine.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER this there only remained to be settled between them the practical details of the project. These were that he should leave home in a couple of days, and take lodgings either in the city of Melchester, or in a convenient suburb of London, till a sufficient time should have elapsed to satisfy legal requirements; that on a fine morning at the end of this time she should hie away to the same place, and be met at the station by St. Cleeve, armed with the marriage license; whence they should at once proceed to the church fixed upon for the ceremony, returning home independently in the course of the next two or three days.

While these tactics were under discussion, the two-and-thirty winds of heaven continued, as before, to beat about the tower, though their onsets appeared to be somewhat lessening in force. Himself now calmed and satisfied, Swithin, as is the want of humanity, took serener views of Nature's crushing mechanics without, and said: "The wind seems indisposed to put the tragic period to our hopes and fears that I spoke of in my momentary despair."

"The disposition of the wind is as vicious as ever," she answered, looking into his face with pausing thoughts on, perhaps, other subjects than that discussed. "It is your mood of viewing it that has changed. 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.'"

And, as if flatly to stultify Swithin's assumption, a circular hurricane, exceeding in violence any that had preceded it, seized hold upon Ring's-Hill Speer at that

moment with the determination of a conscious agent. The first sensation of a resulting catastrophe was conveyed to their intelligence by the flapping of the candle-flame against the lantern-glass; then the wind, which hitherto they had heard rather than felt, rubbed by them like a passing fugitive. Swithin beheld around and above him, in place of the concavity of the dome, the open heaven, with its racing clouds, remote horizon, and intermittent gleam of stars. The dome that had covered the tower had been whirled off bodily, and they heard it descend, crashing, upon the trees.

Finding himself untouched, Swithin stretched out his arms toward Lady Constantine, whose apparel had been seized by the spinning air, nearly lifting her off her legs. She, too, was as yet unharmed. Each held the other for a moment, when, finding that nothing farther happened, they took shelter in the staircase.

"Dearest, what an escape!" he said, still holding her.

"What is the accident?" she asked. "Has the whole top really gone?"

"The dome has been blown off the roof."

As soon as it was practicable he relit the lantern, which had been extinguished, and they emerged again upon the leads, where the extent of the disaster became at once apparent. Saving the absence of the inclosing hemisphere, all remained the same. The dome, being constructed of wood, was light by comparison with the rest of the structure, and the wheels which allowed it horizontal, or as Swithin expressed it, azimuth motion, deprived it of a firm hold upon the walls; so that it had been lifted off them like a cover from a pot. The equatorial stood in the midst, as it had stood before.

Having executed its grotesque purpose, the wind sank to comparative mildness. Swithin took advantage of this lull by covering up the instruments with cloths, after which the betrothed ones prepared to go down-stairs. But the events of the night had not yet fully disclosed themselves. At this moment there was

a sound of footsteps, and a knocking at the door below.

"It can't be for me!" said Lady Constantine. "I retired to my room before leaving the house, and told them on no account to disturb me."

She remained at the top, while Swithin went down the spiral. In the gloom he beheld Hannah.

"Oh, Master Swithin, can ye come home? The wind have blown down the chimley that don't smoke, and the gable with it; and the old ancient house, that have been in your family so long as the memory of man, is bare to the wide world. It is a mercy that your grammer was not killed, sitting by the hearth, poor old soul, and not long to be with us—for 'a's getting feeble on her pins, Mr. Swithin, as folks do. As I say, 'a was all but murdered by the open elements, and doing no more harm than the babe in the wood, not speaking one harmful word; and the fire and the smoke were blowed all across the room like a chapter in Revelation, and your poor reverent father's bescorched to flakes, looking like the vilest ruffian, and the gilt-edge frame spoiled. Every flitch, every eye-piece, and every chop is buried under the walling; and I fed them pigs with my own hands, Master Swithin, little thinking they would come to this unnatural end. Do ye collect yourself, Mr. Swithin, and come at once!"

"I will—I will. I'll follow you in a moment. Do you hasten back and assist."

When Hannah had departed, the young man ran up to Lady Constantine, to whom he explained the accident. After sympathizing with old Mrs. Martin, Lady Constantine said: "I thought something would occur to mar our scheme!"

"I am not quite sure of that yet."

On a short consideration with him, she agreed to wait at the top of the tower till he could come back and inform her if the accident were really so serious as to interfere with his plan of departure. He then left her, and she sat down in the dark, alone, looking over the parapet, and straining her eyes in the direction of the homestead.

At first all was obscurity ; but when he had gone about ten minutes lights began to move to and fro in the hollow where the house stood, and shouts occasionally mingled with the wind, which retained some violence yet, playing over the trees beneath her as on the pipes of an organ. But not a bough of them was visible, a cloak of blackness covering everything netherward ; while overhead the broad windy sky looked down with a strange, disguised face, the three or four stars that alone were visible being so dissociated by clouds that she knew not which they were.

Under any other circumstances Lady Constantine might have felt a nameless fear in thus sitting aloft on a lonely column, with a forest groaning under her feet, and palæolithic dead men feeding its roots ; but the recent passionate decision stirred her pulses to an intensity beside which the ordinary tremors of feminine existence asserted themselves in vain. The apocalyptic effect of the scene surrounding her was, indeed, not inharmonious, and afforded an appropriate background to her intentions.

After what seemed to her an interminable long time, quick steps in the staircase became audible above the roar of the firs, and in a few instants St. Cleeve stood beside her. The case of the homestead was serious. Hannah's account had not been exaggerated in substance ; the gable end of the house was open to the garden ; the joists, left without support, had dropped, and with them the upper floor. By the help of some laborers, who lived near, and Lady Constantine's man Anthony, who was passing at the time, the homestead had been propped up, and protected for the night by some rick cloths ; but Swithin felt that it would be selfish in the highest degree to leave two lonely women to themselves at this juncture. "In short," he concluded despondently, "I cannot go to stay in Melchester or London just now ; perhaps not for another fortnight !"

"Never mind," she said, cheeringly. "A fortnight hence will do as well."

"And I have these for you," he continued. "Your

man Green was passing my grandmother's, on his way back from Warborne, where he had been, he says, for any letters that had come for you by the evening post. As he stayed to assist the other men, I told him I would go on to your house with the letters he had brought. Of course I did not tell him I should see you here."

"Thank you. Of course not. Now I'll return at once."

In descending the column her eye fell upon the superscription of one of the letters, and she opened and glanced over it by the lantern light. She seemed startled, and, musing, said: "The postponement of our—intention must be, I fear, for a long time. I find that after the end of the month I cannot leave home safely even for a day." Perceiving that he was about to ask why, she added. "I will not trouble you with the reason now; it would only harass you. It is only a family business, and cannot be helped."

"Then we cannot be married till—God knows when!" said Swithin, blankly. "I cannot leave home till after the next week or two; you cannot leave home unless within that time. So what are we to do?"

"I don't know."

"My dear, dear one, don't let us be beaten like this! Don't let a well-considered plan be overthrown by a mere accident! Here's a remedy. Do *you* go and stay the requisite time in the parish we are to be married in, instead of me. When my grandmother is again well housed, I can come to you, instead of you to me, as we first said. Then it can be done in time."

Reluctantly, shyly, and yet with a certain gladness of heart, she gave way to his proposal that they should change places in the programme. There was much she did not like in it, she said. It seemed to her as if she were taking the initiative by going and attending to the preliminaries. It was the man's part to do that, in her opinion, and was usually undertaken by him.

"But," argued Swithin, "there are many cases in which the woman does give the notices, and so on;

that is to say, when the man is absolutely hindered from doing so ; and ours is such a case. The seeming is nothing ; I know the truth, and what does it matter ? You do not refuse—retract your word to be my wife, because, to avoid a sickening delay, the formalities require you to attend to them instead of me ?"

She did not refuse, she said. In short, she agreed to his entreaty. They had, in truth, gone so far in their dream of union that there was no drawing back now. Whichever of them was forced by circumstances to be the protagonist in the enterprise, the thing must be done. Their intention to become husband and wife, at first halting and timorous, had accumulated momentum with the lapse of hours, till it now bore down every obstacle in its course.

"Since you beg me to—since there is no alternative between my going and a long postponement," she said, as they stood in the dark porch of Welland House before parting—"since I am to go first, and seem to be pioneer in this adventure, promise me, Swithin, promise your Viviette, that in years to come, when perhaps you may not love me so warmly as you do now——"

"That will never be."

"Well, hoping it will not, but supposing it should, promise me that you will never reproach me as the one who took the initiative when it should have been yourself, forgetting that it was at your request; promise that you will never say I showed immodest readiness to do so, or anything which may imply your obliviousness to the fact that I act in obedience to necessity and your earnest prayer."

Need it be said that he promised never to reproach her with that or any other thing as long as they should live? The few details of the reversed arrangement were soon settled, Melchester being the place finally decided on. Then, with a warm audacity which events had encouraged, he pressed her to his breast, and she silently entered the house. He returned to the homestead, there to attend to the un-

expected duties of repairing the havoc wrought by the gale.

That night, in the solitude of her chamber, Lady Constantine reopened and read the subjoined letter,—one of those handed to her by St. Cleeve:—

—— Street, Piccadilly,
October 15, 18—.

Dear Viviette: You will be surprised to learn that I am in England, and that I am again out of harness—unless you should have seen the latter in the papers. Rio Janeiro may do for monkeys, but it won't do for me. Having resigned the appointment, I have returned here, as a preliminary step to finding another vent for my energies; in other words, another milch cow for my sustenance. I knew nothing whatever of your husband's death till two days ago; so that any letter from you on the subject, at the time it became known, must have miscarried. Hypocrisy at such a moment is worse than useless, and I therefore do not condole with you, particularly as the event, though new to a banished man like me, occurred so long since. You are better without him, Viviette, and are now just the limb for doing something for yourself, notwithstanding the threadbare state in which you seem to have been cast upon the world. You are still young, and, as I imagine (unless you have vastly altered since I beheld you), good-looking: therefore make up your mind to retrieve your position by a match with one of the local celebrities, and you would do well to begin drawing neighboring covers at once. A genial 'squire, with more weight than wit, more realty than weight, and more personalty than realty (considering the circumstances), would be best for you. You might make a position for us both by some such alliance; for, to tell the truth, I have had but in-and-out luck so far. I shall be with you in little more than a fortnight, when we will talk over the matter seriously, if you don't object. Your affectionate brother,

Louis.

It was this allusion to her brother's coming visit which had caught her eye in the tower staircase, and led to a modification in the wedding arrangement.

Having read the letter through once, Lady Constantine flung it aside with a vigor that shook the decaying old floor and casement. Its contents produced perturbation, misgiving, but not retreat. The circumambient glow of enchantment shed by the idea of a private union with her beautiful young lover killed the pale light of cold reasoning from an indifferently good relative. "Oh, no," she murmured, as she sat, covering her face with her hand. "Not for wealth untold could I give him up now!"

No argument, short of Apollo himself from the clouds, would have influenced her. She made her preparations for departure as if nothing had intervened.

CHAPTER VII.

IN her days of prosperity Lady Constantine had often stayed at Melchester, either frivolously, for shopping purposes, or musico-religiously, to attend choir festivals in the cathedral; so there was nothing surprising in her reverting to an old practice. That the journey might appear to be of a somewhat similar nature she took with her the servant who had been accustomed to accompany her on former occasions, though the woman, having now left her service, and settled in the village as the wife of Anthony Green, with a young child on her hands, could with some difficulty leave home. Lady Constantine overcame the anxious mother's scruples by providing that young Green should be well cared for; and knowing that she could count upon this woman's fidelity, if upon anybody's, in case of an accident (for it was chiefly Lady Constantine's exertions that had made an honest wife of Mrs. Green), she departed for a fortnight's absence.

The next day found mistress and maid settled in lodgings in an old brick street, which a hundred years

ago could boast of rank and fashion among its residents; now the broad fan-light over each broad door admitted the sun only to the halls of a caretaker. The lamp-posts were still those that had done duty with oil lights; and rheumatic old coachmen and postilions, that once had driven and ridden gloriously from London to Land's End, ornamented with their bent persons and bow legs the pavement in front of the chief inn, in the sorry hope of earning sixpence to keep body and soul together.

"We are kept well informed on the time o' day, my lady," said Mrs. Green, as she pulled down the blinds in Lady Constantine's room, on the evening of their arrival. "There 's a church exactly at the back of us, and I hear every hour strike."

Lady Constantine said she had noticed that there was a church quite near.

"Well, it is better to have that at the back than other folks' winders. And if your ladyship wants to go there it won't be far to walk."

"That's what occurred to me," said Lady Constantine,—"*if* I should want to go."

During the ensuing days she felt to the utmost the tediousness of waiting merely that time might pass. She went to and from shops, with Green as her companion. Though there were purchases to be made, they were by no means of a pressing nature, and but poorly filled up the vacancies of those strange, speculative days—days surrounded by a penumbra of fear, yet poetized by sweet expectation.

On the fourteenth day she told Green that she was goidg to the cathedral close, and leaving the house she passed in under the nearest archway to that spot, where, wandering about beneath the rooks' nests till her courage was screwed to its highest, she went round to the other side, and searched about for a certain door, which she reached just at the moment when her heart began to sink to its very lowest, rendering all the screwing up in vain.

Whether it was because the month was October, or from any other reason, the deserted aspect of the close

in general sat specially on this building. Moreover the pavement was up, and heaps of stone and gravel obstructed the footway. Nobody was coming, nobody was going, in that thoroughfare: she appeared to be the single one of the human race bent upon marriage business, which seemed to have been unanimously abandoned by all the rest of the world as proven folly. But she thought of Swithin, his blonde hair and ardent eyes and eloquent lips, and was carried onward by the very reflection.

Entering the surrogate's room, Lady Constantine managed at the last juncture to state her errand in tones so collected as to startle even herself; to which her listener replied also as if the whole thing were the most natural in the world. When it came to the affirmation that she had lived fifteen days in the parish, she said, with dismay: "Oh, no! I thought the fifteen days meant the interval of residence before the marriage takes place. I have lived here only fourteen days and a-half. Now I must come again!"

"Oh—well—heh-heh—I think you need not be so particular," said the surrogate. "As a matter of fact, though the letter of the law requires fifteen days' residence, many people make five sufficient. The provision is inserted, as you doubtless are aware, to hinder runaway marriages as much as possible, and secret unions, and other such objectionable practices. You need not come again."

That evening Lady Constantine wrote to Swithin St. Cleeve the last letter of the fortnight:—

My Dearest:—Do come to me as soon as you can. By a sort of favoring blunder I have been able to shorten the time of waiting by a day. Come at once, for I am almost broken down with apprehension. It seems rather rash at moments, all this, and I wish you were here to reassure me. I did not know I should feel so alarmed. I am frightened at every footstep, and dread lest anybody who knows me should accost me, and find out why I am here. I sometimes wonder how I could have agreed to come and enact your part,

but I did not realize how trying it would be. You ought not to have asked me, Swithin; upon my word, it was too cruel of you, and I will punish you for it when you come. But I won't upbraid. I hope the homestead is repaired that has cost me all this sacrifice of modesty. If it were anybody in the world but *you* in question, I would rush home, without waiting here to see the end of it—I really think I would! But, dearest, no. I must show my strength now, or let it be forever hid. The barriers of ceremony are broken down between us, and it is for the best that I am here.

And yet, at no point of this trying prelude need Lady Constantine have feared for her strength. Deeds in this connection demand the particular kind of courage that such perfervid women are endowed with; the courage of their emotions, in which young men are often lamentably deficient. Her fear was, in truth, the fear of being discovered in an unwonted position; not of the act itself. And though her letter was in its way a true exposition of her feeling, had it been necessary to go through the whole Melchester process over again, she would have been found equal to the emergency.

It had been for some days a point of anxiety with her what to do with Green during the morning of the wedding. Chance unexpectedly helped her in this difficulty. The day before the purchase of the license, Green came to Lady Constantine with a letter in her hand from her husband, Anthony, her face as long as a fiddle.

"I hope there's nothing the matter?" said Lady Constantine.

"The child's took bad, my lady!" said Mrs. Green, with floods of water in her eyes. "I love the child better than I shall love all them that's coming put together; for he's been a good boy to his mother ever since twelve weeks afore he was born. 'T was he, a tender deary, that made Anthony marry me, and thereby turned hisself from a little calamity to a little

blessing! For the man were a backward man in the church part o' matrimony, my lady; though he 'll do anything when he 's forced a bit by his manly feelings. And now to lose the child—hoo-hoo-oo-oo— What shall I do!"

"Well, you want to go home at once, I suppose?"

Mrs. Green explained, between her sobs, that such was her desire; and though this was a day or two sooner than her mistress had wished to be left alone, she consented to Green's departure. So, during the afternoon, her woman went off, with directions to prepare for Lady Constantine's return in two or three days. But as the exact day of her return was uncertain, no carriage was to be sent to the station to meet her, her intention being to hire one from the hotel.

Lady Constantine was now left in utter solitude to await her lover's arrival.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MORE beautiful October morning than that of the next day never beamed into the Welland valleys. The yearly dissolution of leafage was setting in apace. The foliage of the park trees, as it had rapidly resolved itself into this complexion and that through the subtle grades of decay, reflected lights of such innumerable hues that it was a wonder to think their beauties only a repetition of what had been exhibited on scores of previous Octobers by predecessors, which yet had been allowed to pass away without a single dirge from the imperturbable beings who walked among them. Far in the shadows semi-opaque screens of blue haze made mysteries of the commonest gravel-pit, dingle, or recess.

The wooden cabin at the foot of Ring's-Hill Speer had been furnished by Swithin as a sitting and sleeping apartment, some little while before this time; for he had found it highly convenient, during night observations at the top of the column, to remain on the

spot all night, not to disturb his grandmother by passing in and out of the house, and to save himself the labor of incessantly crossing the field.

He would much have liked to tell her the secret, and had it been his own to tell would probably have done so; but sharing it with an objector who knew not his grandmother's affection so well as he did himself, there was no alternative to holding his tongue. The more effectually to guard it he decided to sleep at the cabin during the two or three nights previous to his departure, leaving word at the homestead that in a day or two he was going on an excursion.

It was very necessary to start early. Long before the great eye of the sun was lifted high enough to dip into the Welland valley, St. Cleeve arose from his bed in the cabin and prepared to depart, cooking his breakfast upon a little stove in the corner. The young rabbits littered during the foregoing summer watched his preparations through the open door from the gray dawn without, as he bustled, half dressed, in and out under the boughs, and among the blackberries and brambles that grew around. It was a strange place for a bridegroom to perform his toilet in, but, considering the unconventional nature of the marriage, a not inappropriate one. What events had been enacted in that earthen camp since it was first thrown up, nobody could say; but the primitive simplicity of the young man's preparations accorded well with the prehistoric spot on which they were made. Embedded under his feet were possibly even now many rude trinkets that had been worn at bridal ceremonies of the early inhabitants. Little signified those ceremonies to-day, or the happiness or otherwise of the contracting parties. That his own rite, nevertheless, signifies much is the inconsequent reasoning of many another bridegroom than Swithin; and he, like the rest, went on with his preparations, in that mood which sees in his stale repetition the possibilities of an original move.

Then through the wet cobwebs, that hung like movable diaphragms on each blade and bough, he pushed

his way down to the furrow which led from the fir-tree island to the wide world beyond the field.

He was not a stranger to enterprise, and still less to the contemplation of enterprise; but an enterprise such as this, dictated by the grand passion, he had never even outlined. That his dear lady was troubled at the situation he had placed her in by not going himself on that errand he could see from her letter; but believing an immediate marriage with her to be the true way of restoring to both that equanimity necessary to serene philosophy, he held it of little account how the marriage was brought about, and happily began his journey towards her place of sojourn. Passing through a little copse before leaving the parish, the smoke of the newly lit fires of which rose like the stems of trees out of the few cottage chimneys, he heard a quick, familiar footstep in the path ahead of him, and, turning the corner of the bushes, confronted the foot-post on his way to Welland. In answer to St. Cleeve's inquiry if there was anything for himself, the postman handed out one letter, and proceeded on his route.

Swithin opened and read the letter as he walked, till it brought him to a standstill by the sheer weight of its contents. They were enough to agitate a more phlegmatic youth than he. He leaned over the wicket which came in his path, and endeavored to comprehend the sense of the whole.

The large long envelope contained, first, a letter from a solicitor in a northern town, informing him that his paternal great-uncle, who had recently returned from the Cape (whither he had gone in an attempt to repair a broken constitution), was now dead and buried. This great-uncle's name was like a new creation to Swithin. He had held no communication with the young man's branch of the family for innumerable years—never, in fact, since the marriage of Swithin's father with the simple daughter of Welland farm. He had been a bachelor to the end of his life, and amassed a fairly good professional fortune by a long and extensive medical practice in the smoky, dreary manufacturing

town in which he had lived and died. Swithin had always been taught to think of him as the embodiment of all that was unpleasant in man. He was narrow, sarcastic, and shrewd to unseemliness. That very shrewdness had enabled him, without much professional profundity, to establish his large and lucrative connection, which lay almost entirely among a class who neither looked nor cared for drawing-room courtesies.

However, what Dr. St. Cleeve had been as a practitioner matters little. He was now dead, and the bulk of his property had been left to persons with whom this story has nothing to do. But Swithin was informed that out of it there was a bequest of £400 a year to himself—payment of which was to begin with his twenty-first year, and continue for his life, unless he should marry before reaching the age of twenty-five, in which precocious and objectionable event his annuity would be forfeited. The accompanying letter, said the solicitor, would explain all.

This, the second letter, was from his uncle to himself, written about a month before the former's death, and deposited with his will, to be forwarded to his nephew when that event should have taken place. Swithin read, with the solemnity that such posthumous epistles inspire, the following words from one who, during life, had never once addressed him:

"DEAR NEPHEW.—You will doubtless experience some astonishment at receiving a communication from one whom you have never personally known, and who, when this comes into your hands, will be beyond the reach of your knowledge. Perhaps I am the loser by this life-long mutual ignorance. Perhaps I am much to blame for it; perhaps not. But such reflections are profitless at this date; I have written with quite other views than to work up a sentimental regret on such an amazingly remote hypothesis as that the fact of a particular pair of people not meeting, among the millions of other pairs of people who have never met, is a great calamity either to the world in general or to themselves.

"The occasion of my addressing you is briefly this: Nine months ago a report casually reached me that your scientific studies were pursued by you with great ability, and that you were a young man of some promise as an astronomer. My own scientific proclivities rendered the report more interesting than it might otherwise have been to me; and it came upon me quite as a surprise that any issue of your father's marriage should have so much in him, or you might have seen more of me in former years than you are ever likely to do now. My health had then begun to fail, and I was starting for the Cape, or I should have come myself to inquire into your condition and prospects. I did not return till six months later, and, as my health had not improved, I sent a trusty friend to examine into your life, pursuits, and circumstances, without your own knowledge, and to report his observations to me. This he did. Through him I learned, of favorable news:—

"(1.) That you worked assiduously at the science of astronomy.

"(2.) That everything was auspicious in the career you had chosen.

"Of unfavorable news:—

"(1.) That the small income at your command, even when eked out by the sum to which you would be entitled on your grandmother's death and the freehold of the homestead, would be inadequate becomingly to support you as a scientific man, whose lines of work were of a nature not calculated to produce an income for many years, if ever.

"(2.) That there was something in your path worse than narrow means, and that that something was a woman.

"To save you, if possible, from ruin on these heads, I take the preventive measures detailed below.

"The chief step is, as my solicitor will have informed you, that the sum of £400 a year be settled on you for life, provided you do not marry before reaching the age of twenty-five—the annuity to begin at the end of the first six months after you reach the age

of twenty-one ; and, *vice versa*, that if you do marry before reaching that age you will receive nothing thenceforward.

"One object of my bequest is that you may have resources sufficient to enable you to travel and study the Southern constellations. When at the Cape, after hearing of your pursuits, I was much struck with the importance of these constellations to an astronomer just pushing into notice. There is more to be made of the Southern hemisphere than ever has been made of it yet ; the mine is not so thoroughly worked as the Northern, and thither your studies should tend.

"The only other preventive step in my power is that of exhortation, at which I am not an adept. Nevertheless, I say to you, Swithin St. Cleeve, don't make a fool of yourself, as your father did. If your studies are to be worth anything, believe me, they must be carried on without the help of a woman. Avoid her, and every one of the sex, if you mean to achieve any worthy thing. Eschew all of that sort for many a year yet. Moreover, I say, the lady of your acquaintance avoid in particular. I have heard nothing against her moral character hitherto; I have no doubt it has been excellent. She may have many good qualities, both of heart and of mind. But she has, in addition to her original disqualification as a companion for you (that is, that of sex) these two serious drawbacks: she is much older than yourself—"

"*Much* older!" said Swithin, resentfully.

"—and she is so impoverished that the title she derives from her late husband is a positive objection. Beyond this, frankly, I don't think well of her. I don't think well of any woman who dotes upon a man younger than herself. She's half, or quarter, a foreigner, is she not?—or is it only her name? To care to be the first fancy of a young fellow like you shows no great common sense in her. If she were worth her salt, she would have too much pride to be intimate with a youth in your unassured position, to say no worse. She is old enough to know that a

liaison with her may, and almost certainly would, be your ruin; and, on the other hand, that a marriage would be preposterous—unless she is a complete fool, and in that case there is even more reason for avoiding her than if she were in her few senses.

"A woman of honorable feeling, nephew, would be careful to do nothing to hinder you in your career, as this putting of herself in your way most certainly will. Yet I hear that she professes a great anxiety on this same future of yours as a physicist. The best way in which she can show the reality of her anxiety is by leaving you to yourself. Perhaps she persuades herself that she is doing you no harm. Well, let her have the benefit of the possible belief; but depend upon it that in truth she gives the lie to her conscience by maintaining such a transparent fallacy. Women's brains are not formed for assisting at any profound science: they lack the power to see things except in the concrete. She 'll blab your most secret plans and theories to every one of her acquaintance—"

"She's got none!" said Swithin, beginning to get warm.

"—and make them appear ridiculous by announcing them before they are matured. If you attempt to study with a woman, you 'll be ruled by her to entertain fancies instead of theories, air-castles instead of intentions, qualms instead of opinions, sickly prepossessions instead of reasoned conclusions. Your wide heaven of study, young man, will soon reduce itself to the miserable narrow expanse of her face, and your myriad of stars to her two trumpery eyes.

"A woman waking your passions just at a moment when you are endeavoring to shine intellectually is like stirring up the mud at the bottom of a clear brook. All your brightness and sparkle are taken away; you become moping and thick-headed; obstructions that before only brought out your brilliancies now distort and disfigure your each dull attempt to surmount them.

"Like a certain philosopher, I would, upon my soul,

have all young men from eighteen to five-and-twenty kept under barrels: seeing how often, in the lack of some such sequestering process, the woman sits down before each as his destiny, and too frequently enervates his purpose, till he abandons the most promising course ever conceived.

"But no more. I now leave your fate in your own hands. Your well-wishing relative,

"JOCELYN ST. CLEEVE,

"Doctor in Medicine."

As coming from a bachelor and hardened misogynist of seventy-two, the opinions herein contained nothing remarkable; but their practical result in restricting the sudden endowment of Swithin's researches by conditions which turned the favor into a harassment was, at this unique moment, discomfiting and distracting in the highest degree.

Sensational, however, as the letter was, the passionate intention of the day was not hazarded for more than a few minutes thereby. The truth was, the caution and bribe came too late—too unexpectedly, to be of influence. They were the sort of thing which required fermentation to render them effective. Had St. Cleeve received the exhortation a month earlier—had he been able to run over in his mind, at every wakeful hour of thirty consecutive nights, a private catechism on the possibilities opened up by this annuity, there is no telling what might have been the stress of such a web of perplexity upon him—a young man whose love for celestial physics was second to none. But to have held before him, at the last moment, the picture of a future advantage that he had never once thought of, or discounted for present staying power, it affected him about as much as the view of horizons shown by sheet-lightning. He saw an immense prospect; it went, and the world was as before.

He caught the train at Warborne, and moved rapidly toward Melchester; not precisely in the same key as when he had dressed in the hut at dawn, but, as regarded the mechanical furtherances of the journey, as

unhesitatingly as before. And with the change of scene even his gloom left him; his bosom's lord sat lightly in his throne. St. Cleeve was not sufficiently in mind of poetical literature to remember that wise poets are accustomed to read that lightness inversely. Swithin thought it an omen of good fortune, and as thinking is causing in not a few such cases, he was, perhaps, in spite of poets, right.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT the station Lady Constantine appeared, standing expectant; he saw her face from the window of the carriage long before she saw him. He no sooner saw her than he was satisfied to his heart's content with his prize. If his great-uncle had offered him, from the grave, a kingdom instead of her, he would not have accepted it. Swithin jumped out, and nature never painted in a woman's face more devotion than appeared in my lady's at that moment. To both the situation seemed like a beautiful allegory, not to be examined too closely, lest its defects of correspondence with real life should be apparent.

They almost feared to shake hands in public, so much depended upon their passing that morning without molestation. A fly was called, and they drove away.

"Take this," she said, handing him a folded paper. "It belongs to you rather than to me."

At crossings, and other occasional pauses, pedestrians turned their faces and looked at the pair (for no reason but that, among so many, there were necessarily a few of the sort who have eyes to note what incidents chance holds before them as they plod on); but the two in the vehicle could not but fear that these innocent beholders had special detective designs on them.

While driving round the close, a fine-looking man, of middle age, came from the palace gates, and struck

across the grass by a foot-path. He wore a corded shovel hat of glossy beaver, and black breeches.

"Who is he? The bishop, I suppose," said Swithin.

"Yes," Lady Constantine replied. "Dr. Helmsdale. I have seen him two or three times since my arrival. He is but lately consecrated, as you know."

Nothing further happened, and they were set down opposite a shop, about fifty yards from the church door, at five minutes to eleven.

"We will dismiss the fly," she said. "It will only attract idlers."

On turning the corner and reaching the church, they found the door ajar; but the building contained only two persons, a man and a woman—the clerk and his wife, as they learned. Swithin asked when the clergyman would arrive.

The clerk looked at his watch, and said: "At just on eleven o'clock."

"He ought to be here," said Swithin.

"Yes," replied the clerk, as the hour struck. "The fact is, sir, he is a deputy, and apt to be rather wandering in his understanding as regards time and such like, which hev stood in the way of the man's getting a benefit. But no doubt he'll come."

"The regular incumbent is away, then?"

"He's gone for his bare pa'son's fortnight—that's all; and was forced to put up with a weak-talented man or none. I'll tell ye what, sir: I think I'd better run round to the gentleman's lodgings, and try to find him."

"Pray do," said Lady Constantine.

The clerk left the church; his wife busied herself with dusting at the further end, and Swithin and Viviette were left to themselves. The imagination travels so rapidly, and a woman's forethought is so assumptive, that the clerk's departure had no sooner doomed them to inaction than it was borne in upon Lady Constantine's mind that she would not become the wife of Swithin St. Cleeve, either to day or on any other day. Her divinations were continually mislead-

ing her, she knew; but a hitch at the moment of marriage surely had a meaning in it.

"Ah—the marriage is not to be!' she said to herself. "This is a fatality."

It was twenty minutes past, and no parson had arrived. Swithin took her hand. "If it cannot be to-day, it can be to-morrow," he whispered.

"I cannot say," she answered. "Something tells me no."

It was almost impossible that she could know anything of the deterrent force exercised on Swithin by his dead uncle that morning. Yet her manner tallied so curiously well with such knowledge that he was struck by it, and remained silent.

"You have a black tie," she continued, looking at him.

"Yes," replied Swithin. "I bought it on my way here."

"Why could it not have been less somber in color?"

"My great-uncle is dead."

"You had a great-uncle? You never told me."

"I never saw him in my life. I have only heard about him since his death. He spoke in as quiet and measured a way as he could, but his heart was sinking. She would go on questioning; he could not tell her an untruth. She would discover particulars of that great-uncle's provision for him, which he, Swithin, was throwing away for her sake, and she would refuse to be his for his own sake. His conclusion at this moment was precisely what hers had been five minutes sooner: they were never to be husband and wife.

But she did not continue her questions, for the simplest of all reasons: hasty footsteps were audible in the entrance, and the parson was seen coming up the aisle, the clerk behind him wiping the beads of perspiration from his face. The somewhat sorry clerical specimen shook hands with them, and entered the vestry; and the clerk came up and opened the book.

"The poor gentleman's memory is a bit topsy-turvy," whispered the latter. "He had got it in his

mind that 'twere a funeral, and I found him wandering about the cemetery a looking for us. However all's well as ends well.' And the clerk wiped his forehead again.

"How ill-omened!" murmured Viviette. But the parson came out robed at this moment, and the clerk put on his ecclesiastical countenance and looked in his book. Lady Constantine's momentary languor passed; her blood resumed its courses with a new spring. The subdued thunder of the church then rolled out upon the palpitating pair, and no couple ever joined their whispers thereto with more fervency than they.

Lady Constantine (as she for some time continued to be called by the outside world, and may therefore be still called here) had told Green that she might be expected at Welland in a day, or two, or three, as circumstances should dictate. Though the time of return was thus left open, it was deemed advisable, by both Swithen and herself, that her journey back should not be deferred after the next day, in case any suspicions might be aroused. As for St. Cleeve, his comings and goings were of no consequence. It was seldom known whether he was at home or abroad, by reason of his frequent seclusion at the column.

Late in the afternoon of the next day he accompanied her to the Melchester station, intending himself to remain in that city till the following morning. But when a man or youth has such a tender article on his hands as a thirty-hour bride, it is hardly in the power of his strongest reason to set her down at a railway, and send her off like a superfluous portmanteau; wherefore, the experiment of parting so soon after their union proved excruciatingly severe to these. The evening was dull; the breeze of autumn crept fitfully through every slit and aperture in the town; not a soul in the world seemed to notice or care about anything they did. Lady Constantine sighed; and there was no resisting it—he could not leave her thus. He decided to get into the train with her, and keep her company for at least a few stations on her way.

It drew on to be a dark night, and, seeing that there

was no serious risk, after all, he prolonged his journey with her so far as to the junction at which the branch line to Warborne forked off. Here it was necessary to wait a few minutes, before either he could go back or she could go on. They wandered outside the station doorway into the gloom of the road, and there agreed to part.

While she yet stood holding his arm a phæton sped up to the station entrance, where, in wheeling round, the horse suddenly jibbed. The gentleman who was driving, being either impatient, or possessed of a theory that all jibbers may be started by severe whipping, because that plan had answered with one in fifty, applied the lash; as a result of it, the horse thrust round the carriage to where they stood, and the end of the driver's sweeping whip cut across Lady Constantine's face with such severity as to cause her an involuntary cry. Swithen turned her round to the lamplight, and discerned a streak of blood on her cheek.

By this time the gentleman who had done the mischief, with many words of regret, had given the reins to his man and dismounted.

"I will go to the waiting-room for a moment," whispered Viviette, hurriedly; and, loosing her hand from his arm, she pulled down her veil and vanished inside the building.

The stranger came forward and raised his hat. He was a slightly built and apparently town-bred man, of twenty-eight or thirty; his manner of address was at once careless and conciliatory. "I am greatly concerned at what I have done," he said. "I sincerely trust that your wife"—but observing the youthfulness of Swithin, he withdrew the word suggested by the manner of Swithin towards Lady Constantine—"I trust the young lady was not seriously cut?"

"I trust not,' said Swithin, with some vexation.

"Where did the lash touch her?"

"Straight down her cheek."

"Let me go to her and humbly apologize."

"I'll inquire." He went to the ladies' room, in

which Viviette had taken refuge. She met him at the door, her handkerchief to her cheek, and Swithin explained that the driver of the phaeton had sent to make inquiries.

"I cannot see him!" she whispered. "He is my brother Louis! He is, no doubt, going on by the train to my house. We must wait till he is gone."

Swithin, thereupon, went out again, and telling the young man that the cut on her face was not serious, but that she could not see him, after a few words they parted. St. Cleeve then heard him ask for a ticket for Warborne, which confirmed Lady Constantine's view that he was going on to her house. When the branch train had moved off, Swithin returned to his bride, who waited in a trembling state within.

"Is he gone?" she asked; and on being informed that he had departed, showed herself much relieved.

"Where does your brother come from?" said Swithin.

"From London, immediately. Rio before that. He has a friend or two in this neighborhood, and visits here occasionally. I have seldom or never spoken to you of him, because of his long absence."

"Is he going to settle near you?"

"No, nor anywhere, I fear. He is, or rather was, in the diplomatic service. He was first a clerk in the foreign office, and was afterwards appointed attache at Rio Janeiro. But he has resigned the appointment. I wish he had not."

"Why did he resign?"

"He complained of the banishment, and the climate, and everything that people complain of who are determined to be dissatisfied,—though, poor fellow, there is some ground for his complaints. Perhaps some people would say that he is idle. But he is scarcely that; he is rather restless than idle, so that he never persists in anything. Yet if a subject takes his fancy he will follow it up with exemplary patience till something diverts him."

"He is not kind to you, is he, dearest?"

"Why do you think that?"

"Your manner seems to say so."

"Well, he may not always be kind. But look at my face; does the mark show?"

A streak, straight as a meridian, was visible down her cheek. The blood had been brought almost to the surface, but was not quite through, that which had originally appeared thereon having possibly come from the horse. It signified that to-morrow the red line would be a black one.

Swithin informed her that her brother had taken a ticket for Warborne, and she at once perceived that he was going on to visit her at Welland, though from his letter she had not expected him so soon by a few days. "Meanwhile," continued Swithin, "you can now get home only by the late train, having missed that one."

"But, Swithin, don't you see my new trouble? If I go to Welland House to-night, and find my brother just arrived there, and he sees this cut on my face—which I suppose you described to him—"

"I did."

"—he will know I was the lady with you!"

"Whom he called my wife. I wonder why we look husband and wife already!"

"Then what am I to do? For the ensuing three or four days I bear in my face a clew to his discovery of our secret."

"Then you must not be seen. We must stay at an inn here."

"Oh, no!" she said, timidly. "It is too near home to be quite safe. We might not be known; but *if* we were!"

"We can't go back to Melchester now. I'll tell you, dear Viviette, what we must do. We'll go on to Warborne in separate carriages; we'll meet outside the station; thence we'll walk to the column in the dark, and I'll keep you a captive in the cabin till the scar has disappeared."

As there was nothing which better recommended itself, this course was decided on; and after taking from her trunks the articles that might be required for an incarceration of two or three days, they left

the said trunks at the cloak-room, and went on by the last train, which reached Warborne at ten o'clock. It was only necessary for Lady Constantine to cover her face with the thick veil that she had provided for this escapade, to walk out of the station without fear of recognition. St. Cleeve came forth from another compartment, and they did not rejoin each other till they had reached a shdowy bend in the old turnpike road, beyond the irradiation of the Warborne lamplight.

The walk to Welland was long. It was the walk which Swithin had taken in the rain when he had learned the fatal forestallment of his stellar discovery; but now he was moved by a less desperate mood, and blamed neither God nor man. They were not bound for time, and passed along the silent, lonely way with that sense rather of predestination than of choice in their proceedings which the presence of night sometimes imparts. Reaching the park gate they found it open, and from this they inferred that her brother Louis had arrived.

Leaving the house and park on their right, they traced the highway yet a little further, and, plunging through the stubble of the opposite field, drew near the isolated earthwork bearing the plantation and tower, which, together, rose like a flattened dome and lantern from the light-hued plain of stubble. It was far too dark to distinguish firs from other trees by the eye alone, but the peculiar dialect of sylvan language which the piny conclave used would have been enough to proclaim their quality at any time. In the lovers' stealthy progress up the slopes a dry stick here and there snapped beneath their feet, seeming like a shot of alarm.

On being unlocked, the hut was found precisely as Swithin had left it two days before. Lady Constantine was thoroughly wearied, and sat down, while he gathered a handful of twigs and spikelets from the masses strewn without, and lit a small fire, first taking the precaution to blind the little window and relock the door. Lady Constantine looked curiously around by the light of the blaze. The hut was small as the

prophet's chamber provided by the Shunammite; its size was about seven feet by eleven; in one corner stood the stove, with a little table and chair, a small cupboard hard by, a pitcher of water, a rack overhead, with various articles, including a kettle and gridiron; while the other end of the room was fitted out as a dormitory for Swithin's use during late observations in the tower overhead.

"It is not much of a palace to offer you," he remarked, smiling. "But at any rate, it is a refuge."

The cheerful firelight dispersed in some measure Lady Constantine's anxieties. "If we only had something to eat!" she said.

"Dear me," cried St. Cleeve, blankly. "That's a thing I never thought of."

"Nor I, till now," she replied.

He reflected with misgiving. "Beyond a small loaf of bread in the cupboard, I have nothing. However, just outside the door there are lots of those little rabbits, about the size of rats, that the keepers call runners. And they are as tame as possible. But I fear I could not catch one now. Yet, dear Viviette, wait a minute; I'll try. You must not be starved."

He softly let himself out, and was gone some time. When he reappeared, he produced, not a rabbit, but four sparrows and a thrush. "I could do nothing in the way of a rabbit without setting a wire," he said. "But I have managed to get these by knowing where they roost."

He showed her how to prepare the birds, and having set her to roast them by the fire, departed with the pitcher, to replenish it at the brook which flowed near the homestead in the neighboring bottom.

"They are all asleep at my grandmother's," he informed her, when he returned, panting, with the dripping pitcher. "They imagine me to be sixty miles off."

The birds were now ready, and the table was spread. With this fare, eked out by dry toast from the loaf, and moistened with cups of water from the pitcher, to which Swithin added a little wine from the flask he

had carried on his journey, they were forced to be content for their supper.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Lady Constantine awoke, the next morning, Swithin was nowhere to be seen. Before she was quite ready for breakfast she heard the key turn in the door, and felt startled, till she remembered that the comer could hardly be anybody but he. He brought a basket with provisions, an extra cup and saucer and so on. In a short space of time the kettle began singing on the stove, and the morning meal was begun. The sweet resinous air from the firs blew in upon them, as they sat at breakfast; the birds hopped round the door (which, somewhat riskily, they ventured to keep open); and at their elbow rose the the tall, lank column into a realm of sunlight, which only reached them in fitful darts and flashes.

"I could be happy here forever," she said, clasping his hand. "I wish I could never see my great gloomy house again, since I am not rich enough to throw it open, and live there as I ought to do. Poverty of this sort is not unpleasant, at any rate. What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking about my outing this morning. On reaching my grandmother's, she was only a little surprised to see me. I was obliged to breakfast there, or appear to do so, to divert suspicion; and this food is supposed to be wanted for my dinner and supper. There will of course be no difficulty in my obtaining an ample supply for any length of time, as I can take what I like from the buttery without observation. But as I looked at my grandmother's face this morning, and saw her looking affectionately in mine, and thought how she had never concealed anything from me, and had always had my welfare at heart, I felt—that I should like to tell her what we have done."

"Oh, no—please not, Swithin!" she exclaimed, piteously.

"Very well," he answered. "On no consideration will I do so without your assent." And no more was said on the matter.

The morning was passed in applying wet rags and other remedies to the purple line on Viviette's cheek; and in the afternoon they set up the equatorial under the replaced dome, to have it in order for night observations.

The evening was clear, dry, and remarkably cold by comparison with the daytime weather. After a frugal supper, they replenished the stove with charcoal from the homestead, which they also burnt during the day—an idea of Viviette's, that the smoke from a wood fire might not be seen more frequently than was consistent with the occasional occupation of the cabin by Swithin, as heretofore.

At eight o'clock she insisted upon his ascending the tower for observations, in strict pursuance of the idea on which their marriage had been based, namely, that of restoring regularity to his studies.

The sky had a new and startling beauty that night. A broad, fluctuating, semicircular arch of vivid white light spanned the northern quarter of the heavens, reaching from the horizon to the star Eta in the Great Bear. It was the Aurora Borealis, just risen up for the winter season out of the freezing seas of the north, where every autumn vapor was now undergoing rapid congelation.

"Oh, let us sit and look at it!" she said; and they turned their backs upon the equatorial and the southern glories of the heavens to this new beauty in a quarter which they seldom contemplated. The lustre of the fixed stars was diminished to a sort of blueness. Little by little the arch grew higher against the dark void, like the form of the spirit-maiden in the shades of Glenfinlas, till its crown grew near the zenith, and threw a tissue over the whole wagon and horses of the great northern constellation. Brilliant shafts radiated from the convexity of the arch, coming

and going silently. The temperature fell, and Lady Constantine drew her wrap more closely around her.

"We'll go down," said Swithin. "The cabin is beautifully warm. Why should we try to observe to-night? Indeed, we cannot; the Aurora light overpowers everything."

"Very well. To-morrow night there will be no interruption. I shall be gone."

"You leave me to-morrow, Viviette?"

"Yes; to-morrow morning."

Indeed, with the progress of the hours and days, the conviction was borne in upon Viviette more and more forcibly that not for kingdoms and principalities could she afford to risk the discovery of her presence here by any living soul.

"But let me see your face, dearest," he said. "I don't think it will be safe for you to meet your brother yet."

As it was too dark to see her face on the summit where they sat, they descended the winding staircase; and in the cabin Swithin examined the damaged cheek. The line, though broken up into dashes, and so far attenuated as not to be observable by any one but an intimate, had not quite disappeared. But in consequence of her reiterated and almost tearful anxiety to go, and as there was a strong probability that her brother had left the house, Swithin decided to call at Welland next morning, and reconnoitre with a view to her return.

Locking her in, he crossed the dewy stubble into the park. The house was silent and deserted; and only one tall stalk of smoke ascended from the chimneys. Notwithstanding that the hour was hardly nine, he knocked at the door.

"Is Lady Constantine at home?" asked Swithin, with a disingenuousness now habitual, yet unknown to him six months before.

"No, Mr. St. Cleve; my lady has not returned from Melchester. We expect her every day."

"Nobody staying in the house?"

"My lady's brother has been here, but he is gone on

to Budmouth. He will come again in two or three weeks, I understand."

This was enough. Swithin said he would call again, and returned to the cabin, where, waking Viviette, who was not by nature an early riser, he waited on the column till she was ready to breakfast. When this had been shared they prepared to start.

A long walk was before them. Warborne station lay five miles distant, and the next station above that, nine miles. They were bound for the latter; their plan being that she should there take the train to Filton Junction (where the whip accident had occurred), claim her luggage, and return with it to Warborne, as if from Melchester. The morning was cool, and the walk not wearisome. When once they had left the stubble-field of their environment and the parish of Welland behind, they sauntered on comfortably, Lady Constantine's spirits rising as she withdrew further from danger.

They parted by a little brook, about half-a-mile from the station; Swithin to return to Welland by the way he had come.

Lady Constantine telegraphed from Filton to Warborne for a carriage to be in readiness to meet her on her arrival; and then, waiting for the down train, she traveled smoothly home, reaching Welland House about five minutes sooner than Swithin reached the column hard by, after footing it all the way from where they had parted.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM that day forward their lives resumed the old channel in general outward aspect. Perhaps the most remarkable feature in their romantic exploit was its comparative effectiveness as an expedient for the end designed—that of restoring calm assiduity to the studies of these astronomers. Swithin took up his old position as the lonely philosopher at the column, and Lady Constantine lapsed back to immured existence at the house, with apparently not a friend in the parish. The enforced narrowness of life which her limited resources necessitated was now an additional safeguard against the discovery of her relationship with Swithin St. Cleeve. Her neighbors seldom troubled her; as much, it must be owned, from a tacit understanding that she was not in a position to return invitations as from any selfish coldness engendered by her want of wealth.

At the first meeting of the secretly united pair after their short honeymoon, they were compelled to behave as strangers to each other. It occurred in the only part of Welland which deserved the name of a village street, and all the laborers were returning to their midday meal, with those of their wives who assisted with out-door work. Before the eyes of this innocent, though quite untrustworthy group, Swithin and his Viviette could only shake hands in passing, though she contrived to say to him in an undertone: "My brother does not return yet for some time. He has gone to Paris. I will be on the lawn this evening, if you can come." It was a fluttered smile that she bestowed on him, and there was no doubt that every fibre of her heart vibrated afresh at meeting with

such reserve, one who stood in his intimate relation to her.

The shades of night fell early now, and Swithin was at the spot of appointment about the time that he knew her dinner would be over. It was just where they had met at the beginning of the year, but many changes had resulted since then. The flower-beds that had used to be so neatly edged, were now jagged and leafy; black stars appeared on the pale surface of the gravel walks, denoting tufts of grass that grew unmolested there. Lady Constantine's external affairs wore just that aspect which suggests that new blood may be advantageously introduced into the line; and new blood had been introduced, in good sooth—with what result remained to be seen.

She silently entered on the scene from the same window which had given her passage in months gone by. They met with a concerted embrace, and St. Cleeve spoke his greeting in whispers.

"We are quite safe, dearest," said she.

"But the servants?"

"My meagre staff consists of only two and the boy; and they are away in the other wing. I thought you would like to see the inside of my house, after showing me the inside of yours. So we will walk through it instead of staying out here."

She let him in through the casement, and they strolled forward softly, Swithin never before having gone beyond the library. The whole western side of the house was at this time shut up, her life being confined to two or three small rooms in the southeast corner. The great apartments through which they now whisperingly walked wore already that funeral aspect that comes from disuse and inattention. Triangular cobwebs already formed little hammocks for the dust in corners of the wainscot, and a close smell of wood and leather, seasoned with mouse-droppings, pervaded the atmosphere. So seldom was the solitude of these chambers intruded on by human feet that more than once a mouse stood and looked the

twain in the face from the arm of a sofa, or the top of a cabinet, without any great fear.

Swithin had no residential ambition whatever, but he was interested in the place. "Will the house ever be thrown open to gayety, as it was in old times?" said he.

"Not unless you make a fortune," she replied laughingly. "It is mine for life, as you know; but the estate is so terribly saddled with annuities to Sir Blount's distant relatives, one of whom will succeed me here, that I have practically no more than my own little private income to exist on."

"And are you bound to occupy the house?"

"Yes; that was one of the capricious conditions."

"And was there any stipulation in the event of your remarriage?"

"It was not mentioned."

"It is satisfactory to find that you lose nothing by marrying me, at all events, dear Viviette."

"I hope you lose nothing, either—at least, of consequence."

"What have I to lose?"

"I meant your liberty. Suppose you become a popular physicist (popularity seems cooling toward art and coquetting with science nowadays), and a better chance offers, and one who would make you a newer and brighter wife than I am comes in your way: will you never regret this? Will you never despise me?"

Swithin answered by a kiss, and they again went on; proceeding like a couple of burglars, lest they should attract the attention of the cook or Green.

In one of the upper rooms his eyes were attracted by an old chamber organ, which had once been lent for use in the church. He mentioned his recollection of the same, which led her to say: "That reminds me of something! There is to be a confirmation in our parish in the spring, and you once told me that you had never been confirmed. What shocking neglect! Why was it?"

"I hardly know. The confusion resulting from

my father's death caused it to be forgotten, I suppose."

"Now, dear Swithin, you will do this to please me —be confirmed on the present occasion."

"Since I have done without the virtue of it so long, might I not do without it altogether?"

"No, no!" she said, earnestly. "I do wish it, indeed. I am made unhappy when I think you don't care about such serious matters. Without the church to cling to, what have we?"

"Each other. But, seriously, I should be inverting the established order of spiritual things; people ought to be confirmed before they are married."

"That's really of minor consequence. Now, don't think slightingly of what so many good men have laid down as necessary to be done. And, dear Swithin, I somehow feel that a certain levity which has perhaps shown itself in our treatment of this sacrament of marriage—by making a clandestine adventure of what is, after all, a solemn rite—would be well atoned for by a due seriousness in other points of religious observance. This opportunity should therefore not be passed over. I thought of it all last night; and you are a parson's son, remember. In short, Swithin, do be a good boy, and observe the church's ordinances."

Lady Constantine, by virtue of her temperament, was necessarily either lover or *devote*, and she vibrated so gracefully between these two conditions that nobody who had known the circumstances could have condemned her inconsistencies. To be led into difficulties by those mastering emotions of hers, to aim to escape by turning round and seizing the apparatus of religion (which, however, could only rightly be worked by those emotions already bestowed elsewhere)—it was, after all, but Nature's well-meaning attempt to preserve the honor of her daughter's conscience in the trying quandary to which the conditions of sex had given birth. As Viviette could not be confirmed herself, and as the first Sunday in the month was a long way off, she urged Swithin thus.

"And the new bishop is such a good man," she con-

tinued. "Do you remember seeing him in the cathedral close? I liked the look of him much."

"Very well, dearest. To please you I'll be confirmed. My grandmother, too, will be delighted, no doubt."

They continued their ramble; Lady Constantine first advancing into rooms with the candle, to assure herself that all was empty, and then calling him forward in a whisper. The stillness was broken only by these whispers, or the occasional crack of a floor-board beneath their tread. At last they sat down, and, shading the candle with a screen, she showed him the faded contents of this and that drawer or cabinet, or the wardrobe of some member of the family who had died young, early in the century, when muslin reigned supreme, when waists were close to arm-pits,and muffs as large as smuggler's tubs.

The researches among habilimental hulls and husks, whose human kernels had long ago perished, had gone on about half an hour, when the companions were startled by a loud ringing at the front door bell.

CHAPTER XXII.

LADY CONSTANTINE flung down the old-fashioned lace-work, whose beauties she had been pointing out to Swithin, and exclaimed: "Who can it be? Not Louis, surely?"

They listened. An arrival was such a phenomenon at this unfrequented mansion, and particularly a late arrival, that no servant was on the alert to respond to the call; and the visitor rang again, more loudly than before. Sounds of the tardy opening and shutting of a passage door from the kitchen quarter then reached their ears, and Viviette went into the corridor to hearken more attentively. In a few minutes she returned to the dressing-room in which she had left Swithin.

"Yes; it is my brother," she said, with difficult composure. "I just caught his voice. He has no

doubt come back from Paris to stay. This is a rather vexatious, indolent way he has, never to write to prepare me."

"I can easily go away," said Swithin.

By this time, however, her brother had been shown into the house, and the footsteps in the passage were audible, coming in search of Lady Constantine.

"If you will wait there a moment," she said, directing St. Cleeve into her bedroom, which adjoined. "You will be quite safe from interruption, and I will quickly come back." Taking the light, she left him.

Swithin waited in darkness. Not more than ten minutes had passed when a whisper in her voice came through the keyhole. He opened the door.

"Yes; he is come to stay!" she said. "He is at supper now."

"Very well; don't be flurried, dearest. Shall I stay, too?"

"Oh, Swithin, I fear not!" she replied, anxiously. "You see how it is. To-night we have broken the arrangement that you should never come here; and this is the result. Will it offend you if—I ask you to leave?"

"Not in the least. Upon the whole, I prefer the comfort of my little cabin and homestead to the gauntness and alarms of this place."

"There, now, I fear you are offended!" she said, a tear collecting in her eye. "Would that I were going back with you to the cabin! How happy we were, those three days of our stay there! But it is better, perhaps, just now, that you should leave me. Yes, these rooms are oppressive. They require a large household to make them cheerful. . . Yet, Swithin," she added, after reflection, "I will not request you to go. Do as you think best. I will light a night-light, and leave you here to consider. For myself, I must go down-stairs to my brother at once, or he'll wonder what I am doing."

She kindled the little light, and again retreated, closing the door upon him. Swithin stood and waited some time, till he had considered that upon the whole

it would be preferable to leave. With this intention he emerged, and went softly along the dark passage towards the extreme end, where there was a little crooked staircase that would conduct him down to a disused side door. Descending this, he duly arrived at the other side of the house, facing the quarter whence the wind blew, and here he was surprised to catch the noise of rain beating against the windows. It was a state of weather which fully accounted for the visitor's impatient ringing. St. Cleeve was in a minor kind of dilemma. The rain reminded him that his hat and great-coat had been left down-stairs, in the front part of the house; and though he might have gone home without either in ordinary weather, it was not a pleasant feat in the pelting winter rain. Retracing his steps to Viviette's room, he took the light, and opened a closet door that he had seen ajar on his way down; it was a closet in which hung various articles of apparel, upholstery lumber of all kinds filling the back part. Swithin thought he might find here a cloak of hers to throw round him, but finally took down from a peg a more suitable garment, the only one of the sort that was there. It was an old moth-eaten great-coat, heavily trimmed with fur; and in removing it a companion cap of sealskin was disclosed. "Whose can they be?" he thought, and a gloomy answer suggested itself. "Pooh," he then said (summoning the scientific side of his nature), "matter is mattter, and mental association only a delusion." Putting on the garments, he returned the light to Lady Constantine's dressing-room, and again prepared to depart as before.

Scarcely, however, had he regained the corridor a second time, when he heard a light footstep—seemingly Viviette's—again on the front landing. Wondering what she wanted with him further, he waited, taking the precaution to step into the closet till sure it was she. The figure came onward, bent to the keyhole of the bedroom door, and whispered: "Swithin, on second thoughts I think you may stay with safety." Having no further doubt of her personality, he came

out with thoughtless abruptness from the closet behind her, and looking round suddenly she beheld his shadowy outline. At once she raised her hands in horror, as if to protect herself from him; she uttered a shriek, and turned shudderingly to the wall. He came still nearer, and she crouched completely down on the floor, covering her face.

Swithin would have picked her up in a moment, but by this time he could hear footsteps rushing up-stairs, in response to her cry. In consternation, and entirely with the view of not compromising her, he effected his retreat as fast as possible, reaching the bend of the corridor just as her brother Louis appeared with a light at the other extremity.

"What's the matter, for Heaven's sake, Viviette?" said Louis.

"My husband!" she involuntarily exclaimed.

"What nonsense!"

"Oh, yes, it is nonsense; it was nothing."

"But what was the cause of your cry?"

She had evidently by this time recovered her reason and judgment. "Oh, it was a trick of the imagination," she said, with a faint laugh. "I live so much alone that I get superstitious—and—I thought for the moment I saw an apparition!"

"Of your late husband?"

"Yes. But it was nothing; it was the outline of the tall clock and the chair behind. Would you mind going down, and leaving me to go into my room for a moment?"

She entered the bedroom, and her brother went down-stairs. Swithin thought it best to leave well alone, and, going noiselessly out of the house, plodded through the rain homeward. It was plain that agitations of one sort and another had so weakened Viviette's nerves as to lay her open to every impression. That the clothes he had borrowed were some cast-off garments of the late Sir Blount had occurred to St. Cleeve in taking them; but in the moment of returning to her side he had forgotten this, and the shape they lent his figure had obviously been a re-

minder of too sudden a sort for her. Musing thus, he walked along as if he were still, as before, the lonely student, dissociated from all mankind, and with no shadow of right or interest in Welland House or its mistress.

The great-coat and cap were unpleasant companions; but Swithin having been reared, or having reared himself, in the scientific school of thought, he, as has been said, would not give way to his sense of their weirdness. To do so would have been like treason to his own beliefs and aims. When nearly home, at a point where his track converged on another path, there approached him from the latter a group of indistinct forms, whose tones of speech revealed them to be Hezzy Biles, Nat Chapman, Fry, and other laborers. Swithin was about to say a word to them, till, recollecting on his disguise, he deemed it advisable to hold his tongue, lest his attire should tell a too dangerous tale as to where he had come from. By degrees they drew closer, their walk being in the same direction.

"Good-night, stranger," said Nat.

No reply.

All of them paced on abreast of him, and he could perceive in the gloom that their faces were turned inquiringly upon his form. Then a whisper passed from one to another of them; then Chapman, who was the boldest, dropped immediately behind his heels, and followed there for some distance, taking close observations of his outline, after which the men grouped again and whispered. Thinking it best to let them pass on, Swithin slackened his pace, and they went ahead of him, apparently without much reluctance. There was no doubt that they had been impressed by the clothes he wore; and having no wish to provoke similar comments from his grandmother and Hannah, Swithin took the precaution, on arriving at Welland Bottom, to enter the homestead by the outhouse. Here he deposited the cap and coat in secure hiding, afterwards going round to the front, and opening the door in the usual way. In the entry he met Hannah, who said: "D' ye know what have

been seed to-night, Mr. Swithin? The work-folk have dropped in to tell us."

In the room were the men who had outstripped him on the road. Their countenances, instead of wearing the usual knotty irregularities, had a smoothed-out expression of blank concern; and Swithin's entrance having been unobtrusive and quiet, as if he had merely come down from his study up-stairs, they only noticed him by enlarging their gaze, so as to include him in the audience.

"We was in a deep talk at the moment," continued Blore, "and Nat had just brought up that story about old Jeremiah Paddock's crossing the park one night at one o'clock in the morning, and seeing Sir Blount a-shutting my lady out-o'-doors; and we was saying that it seemed a true return that he should perish in a foreign land, when we happened to look up, and there was Sir Blount a-walking along."

"Did it overtake you, or did you overtake it?" inquired Hannah.

"I don't say 't was *it*," returned Sammy. "God forbid that I should drag in a resurrection word about what perhaps was still solid manhood, and has to die. But he, or it, closed in upon us, as 't were."

"Yes, closed in upon us," said Haymoss.

"And I said 'Good-night, stranger,'" added Chapman.

"Yes, 'Good-night, stranger'—that wez yer words, Natty. I support ye in it."

"And then he closed in upon us still more."

"We closed in upon he, rather," said Chapman.

"Well, well; 't is no difference in these solemn matters! And the form was Sir Blount's. My nostrils told me, for—there, 'a smelled. Yes, I could smell 'n, being to leeward."

"Lord, Lord, what an unwholesome scandal about the ghost of a respectable gentleman!" said Mrs. Martin.

"Now, wait. I don't say it were a low smell, mind ye. 'T were a high smell, a sort of gamey flavior, calling to mind venison and hare, just as you'd ex-

pect of a great 'squire—not like a poor man's 'natomy, at all; and that was what strengthened my faith that 't was Sir Blount."

("It was the skins that old coat was made of. I smelled them, too," said Swithin to himself.)

"Well, well; I've not defied the figure of starvation these five-and-twenty year, on nine shillings a week, to be afeared of a walking vapor, sweet or savory," said Hezzy. "So here's home-along."

"Bide a bit longer, and I'm going, too," continued Fry. "Well, when I found 't was Sir Blount my spet dried up within me; for neither hedge nor bush were there for refuge against any foul spring 'a might have made at us."

"'T was very curious; but we had likewise mentioned his name just afore, in talking of the confirmation that's shortly coming on."

"Is there soon to be a confirmation?"

"Yes. In this parish—the first time in Welland church for twenty years. As I say, I had mentioned that he was confirmed the same year that I went up to have it done, as I have very good reason to mind. When we went to be examined, the parson said to me, 'Rehearse the articles of thy belief.' Mr. Blount (as he was then) was next me, and he whispered: 'Women and wine.' 'Women and wine,' says I, as innocent as a lamb; and for that I was sent back till next confirmation, Sir Blount never owning that he was the rascal."

"Confirmation was different at that time," said Biles. "The bishops did n't lay it on so strong then as they do now. Nowadays yer bishop gives both hands to every Jack-rag and Tom-straw that drops the knee afore him; but 't was six chaps to one blessing when we was boys. The bishop a' that time would stretch out his palms and run his fingers over our row of crowns as off-hand as a bank gentleman telling money. The great prophets of the church in them days was n't particular to a soul or two more or less; and, for my part, I think living was easier for 't."

"The new bishop, I hear, is a bachelor-man; or a widow gentleman is it?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Bachelor, I believe, ma'am. Mr. San Cleeve, making so bold, you've never faced him yet, I think?"

Mrs. Martin shook her head. "No; it was a piece of neglect. I hardly know how it happened," she said.

"I am going to, this time," said Swithin, and turned the chat to other matters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SWITHIN could not sleep that night for thinking of his Viviette. Nothing told so significantly of the conduct of her first husband towards the poor lady as the abiding dread of him which was revealed in her by any sudden revival of his image or memory. But for that consideration, her almost child-like terror at Swithin's inadvertent disguise would have been ludicrous.

He waited anxiously through several following days for an opportunity of seeing her, but none was afforded. Her brother's presence in the house sufficiently accounted for this. At length he ventured to write a note, requesting her to signal to him in a way she had done once or twice before—by pulling down a blind in a particular window of the house, one of the few visible from the top of the Rings-Hill column; this to be done on any evening before dark, when she could see him after dinner on the terrace. When he had leveled the glass at the window for five successive nights he beheld the blind in the position suggested. Three hours later, quite in the dusk, he repaired to the place of appointment.

"My brother is away this evening," she explained, "and that's why I can come out. He is not gone for more than a few hours, nor is he likely to do so just yet. He keeps himself a good deal in my company,

which has made it unsafe for me to venture near you."

"Has he any suspicion?"

"None, apparently. But he rather depresses me."

"How, Viviette? I fear, from your manner, that this is something serious."

"I would rather not tell."

"But— Well, never mind."

"Yes, Swithin, I will tell you. There should be no secrets between us. He urges upon me the necessity of marrying, day after day."

"For money and position, of course."

"Yes. But I take no notice. I let him go on."

"Really, this is sad!" said the young man. "I must work harder than ever, or you will never be able to own me."

"Oh, yes, in good time!" she cheeringly replied.

"I shall be very glad to have you always near me. I felt the gloom of our position keenly when I was obliged to disappear, that night, without assuring you it was only I who stood there. Why were you so frightened at those old clothes I borrowed?"

"Don't ask—don't ask?" she said, burying her face on his shoulder. "I don't want to speak of that. There was something so ghastly and so uncanny in your putting on such garments that I wish you had been more thoughtful, and had left them alone."

"I did not stop to consider whose they were. By the way, they must be sent back."

"No; I never wish to see them again! I cannot help feeling that your putting them on was ominous."

"Nothing is ominous in serene philosophy," he said, kissing her. "Things are either causes, or they are not causes. When can you see me again?"

In such wise the hour passed away. The evening was typical of others which followed it at irregular intervals through the winter. And during the intenser months of the season, frequent falls of snow lengthened even more than other difficulties had done the periods of isolation between the pair. Swithin adhered with all the more strictness to the letter of his promise not to intrude into the house, from his sense

of her powerlessness to compel him to keep out should he choose to rebel. A student of the greatest forces in nature, he had, like others of his sort, no personal force to speak of, in a social point of view, mainly because he took no interest in human ranks and intricacies; and hence he was docile as a child in her hands wherever matters of that kind were concerned.

Her brother wintered at Welland; but whether because his experience of tropic climes had unfitted him for the brumal rigors of Britain, or any other reason, he seldom showed himself out-of-doors, and Swithin caught but passing glimpses of him. Now and then, Viviette's impulsive kindness would overcome her sense of risk, and she would press Swithin to call on her, at all cost. This he would by no means do. It was obvious to his more logical mind that the secrecy to which they had bound themselves must be kept in its fullness, or might as well be abandoned altogether.

He was now sadly exercised on the subject of his uncle's will. There had as yet been no pressing reasons for a full and candid reply to the solicitor who had communicated with him, owing to the fact that the annuity was not to begin till Swithin was one-and-twenty; but time was going on, and something definite would have to be done soon. To own his marriage and consequent disqualification for the bequest was easy in itself; but it involved telling at least one man what both Viviette and himself had great reluctance in telling anybody. Moreover, he wished Viviette to know nothing of his loss in making her his wife. All he could think of doing for the present was to write a postponing letter to his uncle's lawyer, and wait events.

The one comfort of his dreary winter-time was his perception of a returning ability to work with the regularity and much of the spirit of earlier days.

One bright night in April there was an eclipse of the moon, and Mr. Torkingham, by arrangement, brought to the observatory several laboring men and boys to whom he had promised a sight of the phenomenon

through the telescope. The coming confirmation, fixed for May, was again talked of; and St. Cleeve learned from the parson that the bishop had arranged to stay the night at the vicarage, and was to be invited to a grand luncheon at Welland House, immediately after the ordinance.

This seemed like a going back into life again as regarded the mistress of that house; and St. Cleeve was a little surprised that, in his communications with Viviette, she had mentioned no such probability. The next day he walked around the mansion, wondering how, in its present state, any entertainment could be given therein. He found that the shutters had been opened, giving an unexpected liveliness to the aspect of the windows. Two men were putting a chimney-pot on one of the chimney-stacks, and two more were scraping green mold from the front wall. He made no inquiries on that occasion. Three days later he strolled thitherward again. Now a great cleaning of window-panes was going on, Hezzy Biles and Sammy Blore being the operators, for which purpose their services must have been borrowed from the neighboring farmer. Hezzy dashed water at the glass with a force that threatened to break it in, the broad face of Sammy being discernible inside, smiling at the onset? In addition to them, Anthony Green and another were weeding the gravel walks, and putting fresh plants into the flower beds. Neither of these reasonable operations was a great undertaking, singly looked at; but the life Viviette had latterly led, and the mood in which she had hitherto regarded the premises rendered it somewhat significant. Swithin, however, was rather curious than concerned at the proceedings, and returned to his tower with feelings of interest not entirely confined to the worlds overhead.

Lady Constantine may or may not have seen him from the house; but the same evening, which was fine and dry, while he was occupying himself in the observatory with cleaning the eye-pieces of the equatorial, skull-cap on head, observing-jacket on, and in other ways primed for sweeping, the customary stealthy

step on the winding staircase brought her form in due course into the rays of the bull's-eye lantern. The meeting was all the more pleasant to him from being unexpected, and he at once lit up a larger light in honor of the occasion.

"It is but a hasty visit," she said, when, after putting up her mouth to be kissed, she had seated herself in the low chair used for observations, panting a little with the labor of ascent. "But I hope to be able to come more freely soon. My brother is still living on with me. Yes, he is going to stay until the confirmation is over. After the confirmation he will certainly leave. So good it is of you, dear, to please me by agreeing to the ceremony. The bishop, you know, is going to lunch with us. It is a wonder he has agreed to come, for he is a man averse to society, and mostly keeps entirely with the clergy on these confirmation tours, or circuits, or whatever they call them. But Mr. Torkingham's house is so very small, and mine is so close at hand, that this arrangement to relieve him of the fuss of one meal, at least, naturally suggested itself; and the bishop has fallen in with it very readily. How are you getting on with your observations? Have you not wanted me dreadfully, to write down notes?"

"Well, I have been obliged to do without you, whether or no. See here—how much I have done." And he showed her a book ruled in columns, headed "Object," "Right Ascension," "Declination," "Features," "Remarks," and so on.

She looked over this and other things, but her mind speedily winged its way back to the confirmation. "It is so new to me," she said, "to have persons coming to the house that I feel rather anxious. I hope the luncheon will be a success."

"You know the bishop?" said Swithin.

"I have not seen him for many years. I knew him when I was quite a girl, and he held the little living of Puddlesub-Hedge, near us; but after that time, and ever since I have lived here, I have seen nothing of him. There has been no confirmation in this village,

they say, for twenty years. The other bishop used to make the young men and women go to Warborne; he wouldn't take the trouble to come to such an out-of-the-way parish as ours."

"This cleaning and preparation that I observe going on must be rather a tax upon you?"

"My brother Louis sees to it, and, what is more, bears the expense."

"Your brother?" said Swithin, with surprise.

"Well, he insisted on doing so," she replied, in a hesitating, despondent tone. "He has been active in the whole matter, and was the first to suggest the invitation. I should not have thought of it."

"Well, I will hold aloof till it is all over."

"Thanks, dearest, for your considerateness. I wish it was not still advisable! But I shall see you in the day, and watch my own philosopher all through the service from the corner of my pew. . . . I hope you are well prepared for the rite, Swithin?" she added, turning tenderly to him. "It would perhaps be advisable for you to give up this astronomy till the confirmation is over, in order to devote your attention exclusively to that more serious matter."

"More serious! Well, I will do the best I can. I am sorry to see that you are less interested in astronomy than you used to be, Viviette."

"No; it is only that these preparations for the bishop unsettle my mind from study. Now put on your other coat and hat, and come with me a little way."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE morning of the confirmation was come. It was mid-May time, bringing with it weather not, perhaps, quite so blooming as that assumed to be natural to the month by the joyous poets of three hundred years ago; but a very tolerable, well-wearing May, that the average rustic would willingly compound for in lieu of Mays possibly fairer, but probably more foul.

Among the larger shrubs and flowers which composed the outworks of the Welland gardens, the lilac, the laburnum, and the guelder-rose hung out their respective colors of purple, yellow, and white; while within these, belted round from every disturbing gale, rose the columbine, the peony, the larkspur, and the solomon's seal. The animate things that moved amid this scene of color were plodding bees, gadding butterflies, and numerous sauntering young feminine candidates for the impending confirmation, who, having gayly bedecked themselves for the ceremony, were enjoying their own appearance by walking about in twos and threes till it was time to start. Swithin St. Cleeve, whose preparations were somewhat simpler than those of the village belles, waited till his grandmother and Hannah had set out, and then, locking the door, followed toward the distant church. On reaching the church-yard gate he met Mr. Torkingham, who shook hands with him in the manner of a man with several irons in the fire, and telling Swithin where to sit, disappeared to hunt up some candidates who had not yet made themselves visible. Swithin, casting his eyes round for Viviette, and seeing nothing of her, went on to the church porch, and looked in. From the north side of the nave smiled a

host of girls, gayly uniform in dress, age, and a tendency to "skip like a hare over the meshes of good counsel." Their white muslin dresses, their round white caps, from beneath whose borders hair-knots and curls, of various shades of brown, escaped upon their low shoulders, as if against their will, lighted up the black pews and gray stonework to an unwonted warmth and life. On the south side were the young men and boys—heavy, angular, and massive, as indeed was rather necessary, considering what they would have to bear at the hands of wind and weather before they returned to that mouldy nave for the last time.

Over the heads of all these he could see into the chancel, to the square pew on the north side, which was attached to Welland House. There he discerned Lady Constantine already arrived, her brother Louis sitting by her side. Swithin entered, and seated himself at the end of a bench, and she, who had been on the watch, at once showed, by subtle signs, her consciousness of the presence of the young man who had reversed the ordained sequence of the church services on her account. She appeared in black attire, though not strictly in mourning, a touch of red in her bonnet setting off the richness of her complexion without making her gay. Handsomest woman in the church she decidedly was; and yet a disinterested spectator who had known all the circumstances would probably have felt that, the future considered, Swithin's more natural mate would have been one of the muslin-clad maidens who were to be presented to the bishop with him that day.

When the bishop had come, and gone into the chancel, and blown his nose, the congregation were sufficiently impressed by his presence to leave off looking at one another. Twenty years, people said, had elapsed since a bishop had sat in that humble and remote house of prayer. The Right Reverend Cuthbert Helmsdale, D.D., ninety-fourth occupant of the episcopal throne of the diocese, revealed himself to be a dark man in skin as well as hair, whose darkness

was thrown still further into prominence by the lawn protuberances that now rose upon his shoulder, like the Eastern and Western hemispheres.

In stature he seemed to be tall and imposing, but something of this aspect may have been derived from his robes. The service was, as usual, of a length which severely tried the tarrying powers of the young people assembled; and it was not till the youth of all the other parishes had gone up that the turn came for the Welland bevy. Swithin and some older ones were nearly the last. When, at the heels of Mr. Torkingham, he passed Lady Constantine's pew, he lifted his eyes from the red lining of that gentleman's hood sufficiently high to catch hers. She was abstracted, tearful—regarding him with all the rapt mingling of religion, love, fervor, and hope which such women can feel at such times, and which men know nothing of. How fervidly she watched the bishop place his hand on her beloved youth's head; how she saw the great episcopal ring glistening in the sun among Swithin's brown curls; how she waited to hear if Dr. Helmsdale uttered the form, "this thy child" (which he used for the younger ones), or "this thy servant" (which he used for those older); and how, when he said "this thy *child*," she felt a prick of conscience, like a person who had entrapped an innocent youth into marriage, for her own gratification, till she remembered that she had raised his position thereby—all this could only have been told in its entirety by herself. As for Swithin, he felt ashamed of his own utter lack of the high enthusiam which beamed so eloquently from her eyes. When he passed her again, on the return journey from the bishop to his seat, her face was warm with a blush, which her brother might have observed had he regarded her.

Whether he had observed it or not, as soon as St. Cleeve had sat himself down again, Louis Glanville turned, and looked hard at the young astronomer. This was the first time that St. Cleeve and Viviette's brother had been face to face. Swithin was not in the habit of noticing people's features; he scarcely

ever observed any detail of physiognomy in his friends, a generalization from their whole aspect being his idea of them; and he now only noted a young man of perhaps thirty, who lolled a good deal, and in whose small dark eyes seemed to be concentrated the activity that the rest of his frame decidedly lacked. This gentleman's eyes were henceforward, to the end of the service, continually fixed upon Swithin; but as this was their natural direction, from the position of his seat, there was no great strangeness in the circumstance.

Swithin wanted to say to Viviette: "Now I hope you are pleased; I have conformed to your ideas of my duty, leaving my fitness out of consideration;" but as he could only see her bonnet, it was not possible even to look the intelligence. He turned to his left hand, where the organ stood, Miss Tabitha Lark being seated behind it. It being now sermon-time, the youthful blower had fallen asleep over the handle of his bellows, and Tabitha pulled out her handkerchief, apparently with the intention of flapping him awake with it. With the handkerchief tumbled out a whole family of unexpected articles; a silver thimble; item, a photograph; item, a little purse; item, a scent-bottle; item, some loose half-pence; item, nine green goose-berries; item, a key. They rolled to Swithin's feet, and, passively obeying the first instinct which came, he picked up as many of the articles as he could find, and handed them to her. Tabitha was so overpowered with consternation at such a wretched event happening to her under the very eyes of the bishop, that she turned pale as a sheet, and could hardly keep her seat. Fearing she might faint, Swithin bent over and whispered: "Shall I take you out into the air?" She declined his offer, and presently the sermon came to an end.

Swithen lingered behind the rest of the congregation sufficiently long to see Lady Constantine, accompanied by her brother, the bishop, the bishop's chaplain, Mr. Torkingham, and several other clergy and ladies, enter to the grand luncheon by the door which

admitted from the church-yard to the lawn of Welland House; the whole group talking with a vivacity all the more intense, as it seemed, from the recent two hours' enforced repression of their social qualities within the adjoining building. The young man stood till he was left quite alone in the church-yard, and then walked slowly homeward over the hill, perhaps a trifle depressed at the impossibility of being near Viviette in this her one day of gayety, and joining in the conversation of those who surrounded her.

Not that he felt any jealousy of her situation as his wife, in comparison with his own. He had so clearly understood from the beginning that, in the event of marriage, their outward lives were to run on as before that to rebel now would have been unmanly in himself and cruel to her, by adding to embarrassments that were great enough already. His momentary doubt was of his own strength to achieve sufficiently high things to render himself, in relation to her, other than a patronized young favorite, whom she had married at immense sacrifice. Now, at twenty, he was doomed to isolation, even from a wife; could it be that at, say, thirty, he would be welcomed everywhere?

But with motion through the sun and air his mood assumed a lighter complexion, and on reaching home he remembered with interest that Venus was in favorable aspect for observation that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXV.

MEANWHILE, the interior of Welland House was in a rattle with the progress of the ecclesiastical luncheon. The bishop, who sat on Lady Constantine's right hand, seemed enchanted with her company, and from the beginning she engrossed his attention almost entirely. The truth was that the circumstance of her not having her whole soul centered on the success of the repast and the pleasure of Bishop Helmsdale imparted to her, in a great measure, the mood to insure both. Her brother Louis it was who had laid out the plan of entertaining the bishop, to which she had assented indifferently. She was secretly bound to another, on whose career she had staked all her happiness. Having thus other interests, she evinced to-day all the ease of one who hazards nothing, and there was no sign of that preoccupation with housewifely contingencies which often so disfigures the not over-rich hostess that she is hardly recognizable as the same charming woman who graced a friend's home the day before. In marrying Swithin, Lady Constantine had played her card—recklessly, impulsively, ruinously, perhaps, but she had played it; it could not be withdrawn; and she took this morning's luncheon as an episode that could result in nothing to her beyond the day's entertainment.

Hence, by that power of indirectness to accomplish in an hour what strenuous aiming will not effect in a life-time, she fascinated the bishop to an unprecedented degree. A bachelor, he rejoiced in the hard-headed period of life that fills the tract of years between the time of waning impulse and the time of incipient dotage, when a woman can reach him neither by awakening a young man's passion nor an old man's

infatuation. Lady Constantine, to external view, was in a position to desire many things, and of a sort to desire them. She was obviously, by nature, warm and impulsive to indiscretion. But instead of exhibiting activities to correspond, recently gratified affection lent to her manner just now a sweet serenity, a truly Christian contentment, which it puzzled the good bishop exceedingly to find in a warm young widow, and increased his interest in her every moment. Thus matters stood, when the conversation veered round to the morning's confirmation.

"That was a singularly engaging young man who came up among Mr. Torkingham's candidates," said the bishop to her, somewhat abruptly.

But abruptness does not catch a woman without her wit. "Which one?" she said, innocently.

"That youth with the 'corn-colored' hair, as a poet of the new school would call it, who sat just at the side of the organ. Do you know who he is?"

In answering, Viviette showed a little nervousness, for the first time that day. "Oh, yes. He is the son of an unfortunate gentleman who was formerly curate here—a Mr. St. Cleeve."

"I never saw a handsomer young man in my life." (Lady Constantine blushed) "There was a lack of self-consciousness, too, in his manner of presenting himself, which very much won me. A Mr. St. Cleeve, do you say? His father must have been St. Cleeve of All Angels, whom I knew. How comes he to be staying on here? What is he doing?"

Mr. Torkingham, who kept one ear on the bishop all the lunch-time, finding that Lady Constantine was not ready with an answer, hastened to reply: "His father was an All Angels man, my lord. The youth is rather to be pitied."

"He was a man of talent," affirmed the bishop. "But I quite lost sight of him."

"He was curate to the late vicar," resumed the parson, "and was much liked by the parish: but, being erratic in his tastes and tendencies, he rashly contracted a marriage with the daughter of a farmer, and

then quarreled with the local gentry for not taking up his wife. This lad was an only child. There was enough money to educate him, and he is sufficiently well provided for to be independent of the world, so long as he is content to live here with great economy But of course this gives him few opportunities of bettering himself."

"Yes—yes, indeed," replied Bishop Helmsdale "Better been left entirely dependent on himself. These half incomes do men little good, unless they happen to be either weaklings or geniuses."

Lady Constantine would have given the world to say: "He is a genius, and the hope of my life;" but it would have been decidedly risky, and in another moment was unnecessary, for Mr. Torkingham said: "There is a certain genius in this young man, I sometimes think."

"Well, he really looks quite out of the common," said the bishop.

"Youthful genius is sometimes disappointing," observed Viviette, not believing it in the least.

"Yes," said the bishop. "Though it depends, Lady Constantine, on what you understand by disappointing. It may produce nothing visible to the world's eye, and yet may complete its development within in a very perfect degree. Objective achievements, though the only ones which are counted, are not the only ones that exist and have value; and I for one should be sorry to assert that, because a man of genius dies as unknown to the world as when he was born, he therefore was an instance of fruit that fell among thorns, or on stony ground."

Objective achievements were, however, those that Lady Constantine had a weakness for in the present case, and she asked her more experienced guest if he thought early development of a special talent a good sign in youth.

The bishop thought it well that a particular bent should not show itself too early, lest disgust should result.

"Still," argued Lady Constantine rather firmly (for

she felt this opinion to be one throwing doubt on Swithin), "sustained fruition is compatible with early bias. Tycho Brahe showed quite a passion for the solar system when he was but a youth, and so did Kepler; and James Ferguson had a surprising knowledge of the stars by the time he was eleven or twelve."

"Yes, sustained fruition," conceded the bishop (rather liking the words), "is certainly compatible with early bias. Fenelon preached at fourteen."

"He is not in the church," said Lady Constantine.

"He is a scientific young man, my lord," explained Mr. Torkingham.

"An astronomer," she added, with suppressed accents of pride.

"An astronomer! Really, that makes him still more interesting than being handsome and the son of a man I knew. How and where does he study astronomy?"

"He has a beautiful observatory. He has made use of an old column that was erected on this manor to the memory of one of the Constantines. It has been very ingeniously adapted for his purpose, and he does very good work there. I believe he occasionally sends up a paper to the Royal Society, or Greenwich, or somewhere, and to astronomical periodicals."

"I should have had no idea, from his boyish look, that he had advanced so far," the bishop answered. "And yet I saw on his face that within there was a book worth studying. His is a career I should very much like to watch."

A thrill of pleasure passed through Lady Constantine's heart at this praise of her chosen one. It was an unwitting compliment to her taste and discernment in singling him out for her own, despite the temporary inexpediency of so doing.

Her brother Louis now spoke. "I fancy he is as interested in one of his fellow-creatures as in the science of astronomy," observed that cynic, dryly.

"In whom?" said Lady Constantine, quickly.

"In the fair maiden who sat at the organ—a pretty girl, rather. I noticed a sort of by-play going on be-

tween them occasionally, during the sermon, which meant mating, if I am not mistaken."

"She!" said Lady Constantine. "She is only a village girl, a dairyman's daughter—Tabitha Lark, who used to come to read to me."

"She may be a savage, for all that I know; but there is something between those two young people, nevertheless."

The bishop looked as if he had allowed his interest in a stranger to carry him too far, and Mr. Torkingham was horrified at the irreverent and easy familiarity of Louis Glanville's talk in the presence of a consecrated bishop. As for Viviette, her tongue lost all its volubility. She felt quite faint at heart, and hardly knew how to control herself.

"I have never noticed anything of the sort," said Mr. Torkingham.

"It would be a matter for regret," said the bishop, "if he should follow his father in forming an attachment that would be a hindrance to him in any honorable career; though perhaps an early marriage, abstractedly considered, would not be bad for him. A youth who looks as if he had come straight from old Greece may be exposed to many temptations, should he go out into the world without a friend or a counselor to guide him."

Despite her sudden jealousy, Viviette's eyes grew moist at the picture of her innocent Swithin going into the world without a friend or counselor. But she was sick in soul and disquieted still by Louis' dreadful remarks, who, unbeliever as he was in human virtue, could have no reason whatever for representing Swithin as engaged in a private love affair if such were not his honest impression. She was so absorbed during the remainder of the luncheon that she did not even observe the kindly light that her presence was shedding on the right reverend gentleman by her side. He reflected it back in tones duly mellowed by his position; the minor clergy caught up the rays thereof, and so the gentle influence played down the table.

The company soon departed, when luncheon was over; and the remainder of the day passed in quietness, the bishop being occupied in his room at the vicarage with writing letters or a sermon. Having a long journey before him the next day, he had expressed a wish to be housed for the night without ceremony, and would have dined alone with Mr. Torkingham, but that, by a happy thought, Lady Constantine and her brother were asked to join them. However, when Louis crossed the church-yard and entered the vicarage drawing-room at seven o'clock, his sister was not in his company. She was, he said, suffering from a slight headache, and much regretted that she was on that account unable to come. At this intelligence the social sparkle disappeared from the bishop's eye, and he sat down to the table, endeavoring to mould into the form of episcopal serenity an expression which was really one of common human disappointment.

In his simple statement, Louis Glanville had by no means expressed all the circumstances which accompanied his sister's refusal, at the last moment, to dine at her neighbor's house. Louis had strongly urged her to bear up against her slight indisposition—if it were that, and not disinclination—and come along with him on just this one occasion, perhaps a more important episode in her life than she was aware of. Viviette thereupon knew quite well that he alluded to the favorable impression she was producing upon the bishop, notwithstanding that neither of them mentioned the bishop's name. But she did not give way, though the argument waxed strong between them; and Louis left her in no very amiable mood, saying: "I don't believe you have any more headache than I have, Viviette. It is some provoking whim of yours—nothing more."

Now in this there was a substratum of truth. When her brother had left her, and she had seen him from the window entering the vicarage gate, Viviette seemed to be much relieved, and sat down in her dressing-room till the evening grew dark, and only the lights

shining through the trees from the parsonage dining-room revealed to the eye where the dwelling stood. Then she arose, and putting on the cloak she had used so many times before for the same purpose, she locked her bed-room door (to be supposed within, in case of any accidental approach from the servant), and let herself privately out of the house. Lady Constantine paused for a moment under the vicarage windows, till she could sufficiently well hear the voices of the diners to be sure they were actually within, and then went on her way, which was towards the Rings-Hill column. She appeared a mere spot, hardly distinguishable from the grass, as she crossed the open ground, and soon became absorbed in the black mass of the fir plantation.

Meanwhile, the conversation at Mr. Torkingham's dinner-table was not of a highly exhilarating quality. The parson, in a long self-communing during the afternoon, had decided that the Diocesan Synod, whose annual session at Melchester had occurred the month previous, would afford a solid unimpeachable subject to launch upon during the meal, whenever conversation flagged; and that it would be one likely to win the respect of his spiritual chieftain for himself, as the introducer. Accordingly, in the further belief that you could not have too much of a good thing, Mr. Torkingham acted upon his idea, and at every pause rallied to the synod point, with unbroken firmness. Everything which had been discussed at that last session—such as the introduction of the lay element into the councils of the church, the reconstitution of the ecclesiastical courts, church patronage, the tithe question—was revived by Mr. Torkingham, and the excellent remarks which the bishop had made in his addresses on those subjects were quoted back to him. As for Bishop Helmsdale himself, his instincts seemed to be to allude in a debonair spirit to the incidents of the past day—to the flowers in Lady Constantine's beds, the date of her house—perhaps with a view of hearing a little more about their owner from Louis, who would very readily have

followed the bishop's lead, had the parson allowed him room. But this Mr. Torkingham seldom did, and about half past nine they prepared to separate.

Louis Glanville had risen from the table, and was standing by the window, looking out upon the sky, and privately yawning, the topics discussed having been hardly in his line. "A fine night," he said at last.

"I suppose our young astronomer is hard at work now," said the bishop, following the direction of Louis's glance towards the clear sky.

"Yes," said the parson, "he is very assiduous whenever the nights are good for observation. I have occasionally joined him in his tower, and looked through his telescope with great benefit to my ideas of celestial phenomena. I have not seen what he has been doing lately."

"Suppose we go?" said Louis. "Would you be interested in seeing the observatory, bishop?"

"I am quite willing to go," said the bishop, "if the distance is not too great. I should not be at all averse to making the acquaintance of so exceptional a young man as this Mr. St. Cleeve seems to be; and I have never seen the inside of an observatory in my life."

The intention was no sooner formed than it was carried out, Mr. Torkingham leading the way.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HALF an hour before this time Swithin St. Cleeve had been sitting in his cabin, at the base of the column, working out some calculations from observations taken on preceding nights, with a view to a theory that he had in his head on the motions of certain so-called fixed stars. The evening being a little chilly, a small fire was burning in the stove, and this and the shaded lamp before him lent a remarkably cozy air to the chamber. He was awakened from his reveries by a scratching at the window-pane like that of the point

of an ivy-leaf, which he knew to be really caused by the tip of his sweetheart-wife's forefinger. He rose and opened the door to admit her, not without astonishment as to how she had been able to get away from her friends.

"Dearest Viv, why, what's the matter?" he said, perceiving that her face, as the lamplight fell on it, was sad, and even stormy.

"I thought I would run across to see you. I have heard something so—so—to your discredit, and I know it can't be true! I know you are constancy itself; but your constancy produces strange effects in people's eyes!"

"Good heavens! Nobody has found us out—— "

"No, no—it is not that. You know, Swithin, that I am always sincere, and willing to own if I am to blame in anything. Now will you prove to me that you are the same by owning some fault to me?"

"Yes, dear, indeed; directly I can think of one worth owning."

"I wonder one does not rush upon your tongue in a moment!"

"I confess that I am sufficiently a Pharisee not to experience that spontaniety."

"Swithin, don't speak so, when you know so well what I mean! Is it nothing to you that, after all our vows for life, you have thought it right to—flirt with a village girl?"

"Oh, Viviette!" interrupted Swithin, taking her hand, which was hot and trembling. "You are full of noble and generous feelings, and regard me with a devoted tenderness that has never been surpassed by woman—how can you be so greatly at fault? *I* flirt, Viviette? By thinking that you injure yourself in my eyes. Why, I am so far from doing so that I continually pull myself up for watching you too jealously, as to-day, when I have been dreading the effect upon you of other company in my absence, and thinking that you rather shut the gates against me when you have big-wigs to entertain."

"Do you, Swithin?" she cried. It was evident that

the honest tone of his words was having a great effect in clearing away the clouds. She added, with an uncertain smile: "But how can I believe that after what was seen to-day? My brother, not knowing in the least that I had an iota of interest in you, told me that he witnessed the signs of an attachment between you and Tabitha Lark in church, this morning."

"Ah!" cried Swithin, with a burst of laughter. "Now I know what you mean, and what has caused this misunderstanding! How good of you, Viviette, to come at once and have it out with me, instead of brooding over it with dark imaginings, and thinking bitter things of me, as many women would have done!" He succinctly told the whole story of his little adventure with Tabitha that morning; and the sky was clear on both sides. "When shall I be able to claim you," he added, "and put an end to all such painful accidents as these?"

She partially sighed. Her perception of what the outside world was made of, latterly somewhat obscured by solitude and her lover's company, had been revived to-day by her entertainment of the bishop, clergymen, and, more particularly, clergymen's wives; and it did not diminish her sense of the difficulties in Swithin's path to see anew how little was thought of the greatest gifts, mental and spiritual, if they were not backed up by substantial temporalities. However, the pair made the best of their future that circumstances permitted, and the interview was at length drawing to a close, when there came, without the slightest forewarning, a smart rat-tat-tat upon the little door.

"Oh, I am lost!" said Viviette, seizing his arm. "Why was I so incautious?"

"It is nobody of consequence," whispered Swithin assuringly. "Somebody from my grandmother, probably, to know when I am coming home."

They were unperceived so far, for the only window which gave light to the hut was screened by a curtain. At that moment they heard the sound of their visitors'

voices, and, with a consternation as great as her own, Swithin discerned the tones of Mr. Torkingham and the Bishop of Melchester.

"Where shall I get? What shall I do?" said the poor lady, clasping her hands.

Swithin looked around the cabin, and a very little look was required to take in all its resources. At one end, as previously explained, were a table, stove, chair, cupboard, and so on; while the other was completely occupied by an Arabian bedstead, hung with curtains of pink-and-white chintz. On the inside of the bed there was a narrow channel, about a foot wide, between it and the wall of the hut. In this cramped retreat Viviette slid herself, and stood trembling behind the curtains.

By this time the knock had been repeated more loudly, the light through the window-blind unhappily revealing the presence of some inmate. Swithin threw open the door, and Mr. Torkingham introduced his visitors.

The bishop shook hands with the young man, told him he had known his father, and at Swithin's invitation, weak as it was, entered the cabin, the vicar and Louis Glanville remaining on the threshold, not to inconveniently crowd the limited space within. Dr. Helmsdale looked benignantly around the apartment, and said: "Quite a settlement in the backwoods—quite: far enough from the world to afford the votary of science the seclusion he needs, and not so far as to limit his resources. A hermit might apparently live here in as much solitude as in a primeval forest."

"His lordship has been good enough to express an interest in your studies," said Mr. Torkingham to St. Cleeve. "And we have come to ask you to let us see the observatory."

"With great pleasure," stammered Swithin.

"Where is the observatory?" inquired the bishop, peering round again.

"The staircase is just outside this door, my lord," Swithin answered. "I am at your service, and will show you up at once."

"And here are your books," said the bishop, turning to the table and the shaded lamp. "You take an observation at the top, I presume, and come down here to record your observations."

The young man explained his precise processes as well as his state of mind would let him, and while he was doing so Mr. Torkingham and Louis waited patiently without, looking sometimes into the night, and sometimes through the door at the interlocutors, and listening to their scientific converse. When all had been exhibited here below, Swithin lit his lantern, and, inviting his visitors to follow, led the way up the column, experiencing no small sense of relief as soon as he heard the footsteps of all three tramping on the stairs behind him. He knew very well that, once they were inside the spiral, Viviette was out of danger, her knowledge of the locality enabling her to find her way with perfect safety through the plantation, and into the park, home.

At the top he uncovered his equatorial, and, for the first time at his ease, explained to them its beauties, and revealed by its help the glories of those stars that were eligible for inspection. The bishop spoke as intelligently as could be expected on a topic not peculiarly his own; but, somehow, he seemed more abstracted in manner now than when he arrived. Swithin thought that perhaps the long clamber up the stairs, coming after a hard day's work, had taken his spontaneity out of him, and Mr. Torkingham was afraid that his lordship was getting bored. But this did not appear to be the case; for, though he said little, he stayed on some time longer, examining the construction of the dome after relinquishing the telescope, while occasionally Swithin caught the eyes of the bishop fixed hard on him. "Perhaps he sees some likeness of my father in me," the young man thought; and the party making ready to leave at this time, he conducted them to the bottom of the tower.

Swithin was not prepared for what followed their descent. All were standing at the foot of the staircase. The astronomer, lantern in hand, offered to

show them the way out of the plantation, to which Mr. Torkingham replied that he knew the way very well, and would not trouble his young friend. He strode forward with the words, and Louis followed him, after waiting a moment, and finding that the bishop would not take the precedence. The latter and Swithin were thus left together for one moment, whereupon the bishop turned.

"Mr. St. Cleeve," he said, in a low voice, "I should like to speak to you privately, before I leave, to-morrow morning. Can you meet me—let me see—in the church-yard, at half past ten o'clock?"

"Yes, my lord," murmured Swithin. And before he had recovered from his surprise the bishop had joined the others in the shades of the plantation.

Swithin immediately opened the door of the hut, and scanned the nook behind the bed. As he had expected, his bird had flown.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALL night the astronomer's mind was on the stretch with curiosity as to what the bishop could wish to say to him. A dozen conjectures entered his brain, to be abandoned in turn as unlikely. That which finally seemed the most plausible was that the bishop, having become interested in his pursuits, and entertaining friendly recollections of his father, was going to ask if he could do anything to help him on in the profession he had chosen. Should this be the case, thought the suddenly sanguine youth, it would seem like an encouragement to that spirit of firmness which had led him to reject his late uncle's offer, because it involved the renunciation of Lady Constantine.

At last he fell asleep; and when he awoke it was so late that the hour was ready to solve what conjecture could not. After a hurried breakfast he paced across the fields, entering the church-yard by the south gate precisely at the appointed minute. The inclosure was

well adapted for a private interview, being bounded by bushes of laurel and alder nearly on all sides. He looked round; the bishop was not there, nor any living creature save himself. Swithin sat down upon a tombstone to await Dr. Helmsdale's arrival.

While he sat he fancied he could hear voices, not far off, and further attention convinced him that they came from Lady Constantine's lawn, which was only divided from the church-yard by a high wall and shrubbery. As the bishop still delayed his coming, though the time was nearly eleven, and as the lady whose sweet voice mingled with those heard from the lawn was his personal property, he became exceedingly curious to learn what was going on within that screened promenade. A way of doing so occurred to him. The key was in the church door; he opened it, entered, and ascended to the ringer's loft in the west tower. At the back of this was a window commanding a full view of Viviette's garden front.

The flowers were all in gayest bloom, and the creepers on the walls of the house were bursting into tufts of young green. A broad gravel-walk ran from end to end of the facade, terminating in a large conservatory. In the walk were three people, pacing up and down. Lady Constantine's was the central figure, her brother being on one side of her, and the stately form of the bishop on the other. She carried over her shoulder a sunshade lined with red, which she twirled idly. They were laughing and chatting gaily, and when the group approached the church-yard many of their remarks entered the silence of the church tower through the ventilator of the window.

The conversation was general enough to Swithin. At length Louis stepped upon the grass, and picked up something, which turned out to be a bowl that had lain there; throwing it forward, he took a second, and bowled it toward the first, or jack. The bishop, who seemed to be in a sprightly mood, followed suit, and bowled one in a curve toward the jack, turning and speaking to Lady Constantine as he concluded the feat. As she had not left the gravel walk, he raised

his voice, so that the words reached Swithin distinctly. "Do you follow us?" he asked, gayly.

"I am not skillful," she said. "I always bowl narrow."

The bishop meditatively paused. "This moment reminds one of the scene in Shakespeare's Richard the Second," he said. "I mean the Duke of York's garden, where the queen and her two ladies play, and the queen says—

> 'What sport shall we devise here in this garden,
> To drive away the heavy thought of care?'

To which her lady answers: 'Madam, we'll play at bowls.'"

"That's an unfortunate quotation for you," said Lady Constantine; "for, if I don't forget, the queen declines, saying: ''T will make me think the world is full of rubs, and that my fortune runs against the bias.'"

"Then I am *mal a propos*. But it is an interesting old game, and might have been played at that very date, on this very green."

The bishop lazily bowled another, and while he was doing it Viviette's glance rose by accident to the church-tower window, where she recognized Swithin's face. Her surprise was only momentary; and waiting till both her companions' backs were turned, she smiled and blew him a kiss. In another minute she had another opportunity, and blew him another; afterwards blowing him one a third time.

Her blowings were put a stop to by the bishop and Louis throwing down the bowls and rejoining her in the path, the house-clock at the moment striking half past eleven.

"This is a fine way of keeping an engagement," said Swithin. "I have waited an hour while you indulge in these trifles."

He fumed, turned, and behold, somebody was at his elbow: Tabitha Lark. Swithin started, and said: "How did you come here, Tabitha?"

"In the course of my calling, Mr. St. Cleeve," said

the smiling girl. "I come to practice on the organ. When I entered I saw you up here through the tower arch, and I crept up to see what you were looking at. The bishop is a striking man, is he not?"

"Yes, rather," said Swithen.

"I think he is much devoted to Lady Constantine, and I am glad of it. Are n't you?"

"Oh, yes—very," said Swithin, wondering if Tabitha had seen the tender little salutes of Lady Constantine and himself.

"I don't think she cares much for him," added Tabitha, judicially. "Or, even if she does, she could be got away from him in no time by a younger man."

"Pooh, that's nothing," said Swithin, impatiently.

Tabitha then remarked that her blower had not come to time, and that she must go to look for him; upon which she descended the stairs, and left Swithin again alone.

A few minutes later the bishop looked suddenly at his watch, Lady Constantine having withdrawn towards the house. Apparently apologizing to Louis, the bishop came down the terrace, and through the door into the church-yard. Swithin hastened downstairs, and met him in the path under the sunny wall of the aisle. Their glances met, and it was with some consternation that Swithin beheld the change that a few short minutes had wrought in that episcopal countenance. On the lawn with Lady Constantine, the rays of an almost perpetual smile had brightened his dark aspect like flowers in a shady place; now the smile was gone as completely as yesterday; the lines of his face were firm; his dark eyes and whiskers were overspread with gravity; and as he gazed upon Swithin from the repose of his stable figure, it was like an evangelical King of Spades come to have it out with the Knave of Hearts.

To return for a moment to Louis Glanville. He had been somewhat struck with the abruptness of the bishop's departure, and more particularly by the circumstance that he had gone away by the private door into the church-yard, instead of by the regular exit

on the other side. True, great men were known to suffer from an absence of mind, and Bishop Helmsdale, having a dim sense that he had entered by that door yesterday, might have unconsciously turned thitherward now. Louis, upon the whole, thought little of the matter, and being now left quite alone on the lawn, he seated himself in an arbor, and began smoking.

The arbor was situated against the church-yard wall. The atmosphere was as still as the air of a hot-house; fourteen inches of brickwork only divided Louis from the scene of the bishop's interview with St. Cleeve, and, as voices on the lawn had been audible to Swithin in the church-yard, it is obvious that voices in the church-yard could be heard without difficulty from that close corner of the lawn. No sooner had Louis lit a cigar than the dialogue began.

"Ah, you are here, St. Cleeve," said the bishop, hardly replying to Swithin's good morning. "I fear I am a little late. Well, my request to you to meet me may have seemed somewhat unusual, seeing that we were strangers till a few hours ago."

"I don't mind that, if you wish to see me, my lord."

"I thought it best to see you regarding your confirmation yesterday; and my reason for taking a more active step with you than I should otherwise have done is that I have some interest in you through having known your father when we were undergraduates. His room was on the same staircase with mine at All Angels, and we were friendly till time and affairs separated us even more completely than usually happens. However, about your presenting yourself for confirmation." (The bishop's voice grew stern.) "If I had known yesterday morning what I knew twelve hours later, I wouldn't have confirmed you at all."

"Indeed, Bishop Helmsdale!"

"Yes, I say it, and I mean it. I visited your observatory last night."

"You did!"

"In inspecting it I noticed something which I may

treaty describe as extraordinary. I have had young men present themselves to me who turned out to be notoriously unfit, either from giddiness, from being profane or intemperate, or from some bad quality or other. But I never remember a case which equaled the cool culpability of this. While infringing the first principles of social decorum, you might at least have respected the ordinance sufficiently to have stayed away from it altogether. Now I have sent for you here to see if a last entreaty and a direct appeal to your sense of manly uprightness will have any effect in inducing you to change your course of life."

The voice of Swithin in his next remark showed how tremendously this attack of the bishop had told upon his feelings. Louis, of course, did not know the reason why the words should have affected him precisely as they did; to any one in the secret, the double embarrassment arising from misapprehended ethics and inability to set matters right, because his word of secrecy to another was inviolable, would have accounted for the young man's emotions sufficiently well.

"I am very sorry you should have seen anything objectionable, my lord," said Swithin. "May I ask what it was?"

"You know what it was. Something in your chamber, which forced me to the above conclusions. I disguised my feelings of sorrow at the time for obvious reasons, but I never in my whole life was so shocked."

"At what, my lord?"

"At what I saw."

"Pardon me, Bishop Helmsdale, but you said just now that we are strangers; so what you saw in my cabin concerns me only."

"There I contradict you. Twenty-four hours ago that remark would have been plausible enough; but by presenting yourself for confirmation at my hands, you have invited my investigation into your principles."

Swithin sighed. "I admit it," he said.

"And what do you find them?"

"You say reprehensible. But you might at least let me hear the proof."

"I can do more. I can let you see it."

There was a pause. Louis Glanville was so highly interested that he stood upon the seat of the arbor, and looked through the leafage over the wall. The bishop had produced an article from his pocket.

"What is it, my lord?" said Swithin, scrutinizing the object with a microscopic look of curiosity, as if he did not understand its nature or use.

"Why, don't you see?" said the bishop, holding it out between his finger and thumb in Swithin's face. "A bracelet—a coral bracelet. I found it on the coverlet in your chamber. And of the sex of the owner there can be no doubt. More than that, she was concealed behind the curtains, for I saw them move." In the decision of his opinion the bishop threw the coral bracelet down on a tombstone.

"Nobody was in my room, my lord, who had not a perfect right to be there," said the young man, firmly.

"Well, well, that's a matter of assertion. Now don't get in a passion, and say to me in your haste what you'll repent of saying afterwards."

"I am not in a passion, my lord, I assure you. I am too sad for passion."

"Very well; that's a hopeful sign. Now I would ask you, as one man of another, do you think that to come to me, the bishop of this large and important diocese, as you came yesterday, and pretend to be something that you are not, is quite upright conduct, leave alone religion? Think it over. We may never meet again. But bear in mind what your bishop and spiritual head says to you, and see if you cannot mend before it is too late."

Swithin was meek as Moses, and he brushed away a tear. "My lord, I am in a difficult position," he said mournfully. "How difficult, nobody but myself can tell. I cannot explain; there are insuperable reasons against it. But will you take my word of assurance that I am not so bad as I seem? Some day I will

prove it. Till then I only ask you to suspend your judgment on me."

The bishop shook his head, and went towards the vicarage. Swithin followed him with his eyes, and Louis' followed the direction of Swithin's. Before the bishop had reached the vicarage entrance, Lady Constantine crossed in front of him. She had a basket on her arm, and was, in fact, going to visit some of the poorer cottages. Who could believe the bishop now to be the same man that he was a moment before? The darkness left his face as if he had come out of a cave; his look was all sweetness and shine and gayety, as he again greeted Viviette.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE conversation which arose between the bishop and Lady Constantine was of that lively and reproductive kind which cannot be begun and ended during any reasonable halt of two people traveling in opposite directions. He turned, and walked with her along the laurel-screened lane that bordered the church-yard, till their voices died away in the distance. Swithin then aroused himself from his thoughtful regard of them, and went out of the church-yard by another gate. Seeing himself now to be left alone on the scene, Louis Glanville descended from his post of observation in the arbor, and came through the private doorway to that spot among the graves whereon the bishop and St. Cleeves had conversed. On the tombstone still lay the coral bracelet which Dr. Helmsdale had flung down there in his indignation; for the agitated, introspective mood into which Swithin had been thrown had banished from his mind all thought of securing the trinket, and putting it in his pocket.

Louis picked up the little red scandal-breeding thing, and while walking on with it in his hand he observed Tabitha Lark approaching the church, in

company with the young blower whom she had gone in search of, to assist her in her organ-practicing within. Louis immediately put together, with that rare diplomatic keenness of which he was proud, the little scene he had witnessed between Tabitha and Swithin during the confirmation, and the bishop's stern statement as to where he had found the bracelet. He had no longer any doubt that it belonged to her. "Poor girl!" he said to himself, and sang in an undertone—

"Tra deri, dera,
L'histoire n'est pas nouvelle!"

When she drew nearer, Louis called her by name. She sent the boy into the church, and came forward, blushing at having been called by so fine a gentleman. Louis held out the bracelet.

"Here is something I have found, or somebody else has found," he said to her. "I won't state where. Put it away, and say no more about it. I will not mention it either. Now go into the church where you were going, and may God have mercy on your soul, my dear."

"Thank you, sir," said Tabitha, with some perplexity, yet inclined to be pleased, and only recognizing in the situation the fact that Lady Constantine's humorous brother was making her a present.

"You are much obliged to me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, Miss Lark, I've discovered a secret, you see."

"What may that be, Mr Glanville?"

"That you are in love."

"I don't admit it, sir. Who told you so?"

"Nobody. Only I put two and two together. Now take my advice. Beware of lovers! They are a bad lot, and bring young women to tears."

"Some do, I dare say! But some don't."

"And you think that in your particular case the latter alternative will hold good? We generally think we shall be lucky ourselves, though all the world before us, in the same situation, have been otherwise."

"Oh, yes, or we should die outright of despair."

"Well, I don't think you will be lucky in your case."

"Please, how do you know so much, since my case has not yet arrived?" asked Tabitha, tossing her head a little disdainfully, but less than she might have done if he had not obtained a charter for his discourse by giving her the bracelet.

"Fie, Tabitha!"

"I tell you it has not arrived!" she said, with some anger. "I have not got a lover, and everybody knows I haven't, and it's an insinuating thing for you to say so!"

Louis laughed, thinking how natural it was that a girl should so emphatically deny circumstances that would not bear curious inquiry. "Why, of course I meant myself," he said, soothingly. "So, then, you will not accept me?"

"I didn't know you meant yourself," she replied. "But I won't accept you. And I think you ought not to jest on such subjects."

"Well, perhaps not. However, don't let the bishop see your bracelet, and all will be well. But mind, lovers are deceivers."

Tabitha laughed, and they parted, the girl entering the church. She had been feeling almost certain that, having accidentally found the bracelet somewhere, he he had presented it in a whim to her as the first girl he met. Yet now she began to have momentary doubts whether he had not been laboring under a mistake, and had imagined her to be the owner. The bracelet was not valuable; it was in fact a mere toy—the pair of which this was one being a little present made to Lady Constantine by Swithin on the day of their marriage; and she had not worn them with sufficient frequency out of doors for Tabitha to recognize either as positively her ladyship's. But when, out of sight of the blower, the girl momentarily tried it on, in a corner by the organ, it seemed to her that the ornament was possibly Lady Constantine's. Now that the pink beads shone before her own eyes on her own arm, she remembered having seen a bracelet with just such an

effect gracing the wrist of Lady Constantine, upon one occasion. A temporary self-surrender to the sophism that if Mr. Louis Glanville chose to give away anything belonging to his sister, she, Tabitha, had a right to take it without question was soon checked by a resolve to carry the tempting strings of coral to her ladyship that evening, and inquire the truth about them. This decided on, she slipped the bracelet into her pocket, and played her voluntaries with a light heart.

Bishop Helmsdale did not tear himself away from Welland until about two o'clock that afternoon, which was three hours later than he had intended to leave. It was with a feeling of relief that Swithin, looking from the top of the tower, saw the carriage drive out from the vicarage into the turnpike road, and whirl the right reverend gentleman again toward Warborne. The coast being now clear of him, Swithin meditated how to see Viviette, and explain what had happened, and with this in view waited where he was till evening came on.

Meanwhile, Lady Constantine and her brother dined by themselves at Welland House. They had not met since the morning, and as soon as they were left alone Louis said: "You have done very well so far; but you might have been a little warmer."

"Done well?" she asked, with surprise.

"Yes, with the bishop. The difficult question is how to follow up our advantage. How are you to keep yourself in sight of him?"

"Heavens, Louis! You don't seriously mean that the Bishop of Melchester has any feelings for me other than friendly?"

"Viviette, this is affectation. You know he has as well as I do."

She sighed. "Yes," she said. "I own I had a suspicion of the same thing. What a misfortune!"

"A misfortune? Surely the world is turned upside down! You will drive me to despair about our

future, if you see things so awry. Exert yourself to do something, so as to make of this accident a stepping-stone to higher things. The gentleman will give us the slip, if we don't pursue the friendship at once."

"I cannot have you talk like this!" she cried, impatiently. "I have no more thought of the bishop than I have of the pope. I would much rather not have had him here to lunch at all. You said it would be necessary to do it, and an opportunity, and I thought it my duty to show some hospitality when he was coming so near, Mr. Torkingham's house being so small. But of course I understood that the opportunity would be one for you in getting to know him, your prospects being so indefinite at present; not one for me."

"If you don't follow up this chance of being spiritual queen of Melchester, you will never have another of being anything. Mind this, Viviette: you are not so young as you were. You are getting on to be a middle-aged woman, and your black hair is precisely of the sort which time quickly turns gray. You must make up your mind to grizzled bachelors or widowers. Young marriageable men won't look at you; or if they do just now, in a year or two they 'll despise you as an antiquated party."

Lady Constantine perceptibly paled.

"Young men what?" she asked. "Say that again."

"I said it was no use to think of young men; they won't look at you soon; or if they do, it will be to look away again very quickly."

"You imply that if I were to marry a man younger than myself he would speedily acquire a contempt for me? How much younger must a man be than his wife—to get that feeling for her?"

She was resting her elbow on the chair as she faintly spoke the words, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"An exceedingly small number of years," said Louis, dryly. "Now the bishop is at least fifteen years older than you, and on that account, no less than on others,

is an excellent match. You would be head of the church in this diocese: what more can you require after these years of miserable obscurity? In addition, you would escape that thorn in the flesh of bishops' wives, of being only Mrs. while their husbands are peers."

She was not listening; his previous observation still detained her thoughts. "Louis," she said, "in the case of a woman marrying a man much younger than herself, does he get to dislike her, even if there has been a social advantage to him in the union?"

"Yes—not a whit less. Ask any person of experience. But what of that? Let's talk of our own affairs. You say you have no thought of the bishop. And yet if he had stayed here another day or two he would have proposed to you straight off."

"Seriously, Louis, I could not accept him."

"Why not?"

"I don't love him."

"Oh, oh, I like those words!" cried Louis, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking at the ceiling in satirical enjoyment. "A woman who at two-and-twenty married for convenience, at thirty talks of not marrying without love; the rule of inverse ratio, that is, in which more requires less, and less requires more. As your only brother, older than yourself, and more experienced, I insist that you encourage the bishop."

"Don't quarrel with me, Louis," she said, piteously. "We don't know that he thinks anything of me—we only guess."

"I know it—and you shall hear how I know. I am of a curious and conjectural nature, as you are aware. Last night, when everybody had gone to bed, I stepped out for a five minutes' smoke on the lawn, and walked down to where you get near the vicarage windows. While I was there in the dark, one of them opened, and Bishop Helmsdale leaned out. The illuminated oblong of your window shone him full in the face between the trees, and presently your shadow crossed it. He waved his hand, and murmured some tender

words, though what they were, exactly, I could not hear."

"What a vague, imaginary story—as if he could know my shadow! Besides, a man of the bishop's dignity would n't have done such a thing. When I knew him as a younger man he was not at all romantic—he's not likely to have grown so now."

"That's just what he is likely to have done. No lover is so extreme a specimen of the species as an old lover. Come, Viviette, no more of this fencing. I have entered into the project heart and soul—so much that I have postponed my departure till the matter is well under way."

"Louis—my dear Louis—you will bring me into some disagreeable position!" she said, clasping her hands. "I do entreat you not to interfere, or do anything rash about me. The step is impossible. I have something to tell you some day. I must live on and endure——"

"Everything except this penury," replied Louis, unmoved. "Come, I have begun the campaign by inviting Bishop Helmsdale, and I'll take the responsibility of carrying it on. All I ask of you is not to make a ninny of yourself. Come, give me your promise!"

"No, I cannot—I don't know how to. I only know one thing—that I am in no hurry——"

"No hurry be hanged! Agree, like a good sister, to charm the bishop."

"I must consider!" she replied, with perturbed evasiveness.

It being a fine evening, Louis went out of the house to enjoy his cigar in the shrubbery. On reaching his favorite seat he found he had left his cigar-case behind him; he immediately returned for it. When he approached the window by which he had emerged, he saw Swithin St. Cleeve standing there in the dusk, talking to Viviette inside.

St. Cleeve's back was toward Louis, but, whether at a signal from her or by accident, he immediately turned and recognized Glanville; whereupon, raising his

hat to Lady Constantine, the young man passed along the terrace walk and by the church-yard door.

Louis rejoined his sister. "I did n't know you allowed your lawn to be a public thoroughfare for the parish," he said, suspiciously.

"I am not exclusive, especially since I have been so poor," replied she.

"Then, do you let everybody pass this way, or only that illustrious youth, because he is so good looking?"

"I have no strict rule in the case. Mr. St. Cleeve is an acquaintance of mine, and he can certainly come here if he chooses." Her color rose somewhat, and she spoke warmly.

Louis was too cautious a bird to reveal to her what had suddenly dawned upon his mind—that his sister, in common with the (to his thinking) unhappy Tabitha Lark, had been foolish enough to get interested in this phenomenon of the parish, this scientific Adonis. But he resolved to cure at once her tender feeling, if it existed, by letting out a secret which would inflame her dignity against her weakness.

"A good-looking young man," he said, with his eyes where Swithin had vanished. "But not so good as he looks. In fact, a regular young sinner."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, only a little feature I discovered in St. Cleeve's history. But I suppose he has a right to sow his wild oats as well as other young men."

"Tell me what you allude to—do, Louis."

"It is hardly fit that I should. However, the case is amusing enough. I was sitting in the arbor to-day, and was an unwilling listener to the oddest interview I ever heard of. Our friend the bishop discovered, last night, that our astronomer was not alone in his seclusion. A lady shared his romantic cabin; and finding this, the bishop naturally enough felt that the ordinance of confirmation had been profaned. So his lordship sent for Master Swithin this morning, and, meeting him in the church-yard, read him such an excommunicating lecture as I warrant he won't forget

in his life time. Ha-ha-ha! 'Twas very good—very."

He watched her face narrowly, while he spoke with such seeming carelessness. Instead of the agitation of jealousy that he had expected to be aroused by this hint of another woman in the case, there was a curious expression, more like embarrassment than anything else, which might have been fairly attributed to the subject. Can it be that I am mistaken? he asked himself.

The possibility that he might be mistaken restored Louis to good humor, and, the lights having been brought, he sat with his sister for some time, talking with purpose of Swithin's low rank on one side, and the possibly sordid struggles that were in store for him. St. Cleeve being in the unhappy position of deriving his existence from two channels of society, it resulted that he seemed to either belong to this or that, according to the attitude of the beholder. Louis threw the light entirely on Swithin's agricultural side, bringing out old Mrs. Martin and her connections and her ways of life with luminous distinctness, till Lady Constantine became greatly depressed. She, in her hopefulness, had almost forgotten, latterly, that the bucolic element, so incisively represented by Messrs. Hezzy Biles, Haymoss Fry, Sammy Blore, and the rest, entered into his condition at all; to her he had been the son of his academic father alone.

But she would not reveal the depression to which she had been subjected by this resuscitation of the homely half of poor Swithin; presently putting an end to the subject, however, by walking hither and thither about the room.

"What have you lost?" said Louis, observing her movements.

"Nothing of consequence—a bracelet."

"Coral?" he inquired, calmly.

"Yes. How did you know it was coral? You have never seen it, have you?"

He was about to make answer; but the amazed enlightenment which her announcement had produced

in him, through knowing where the bishop had found such an article, led him to reconsider himself. Then, like an astute man, by no means sure of the dimensions of the intrigue he might be unearthing, he said, carelessly: "I found such a one in the church-yard to-day. But I thought it appeared to be of no great rarity, and I gave it to one the village girls who was passing by."

"Did she take it? Who was she?" said the unsuspecting Viviette.

"Really, I don't remember. I suppose it is of no consequence?"

"Oh, no; its value is nothing, comparatively. It was only one of a pair such as young girls wear." Lady Constantine could not add that, in spite of this, she herself valued it as being Swithin's present, and the best he could afford.

Panic-struck by his ruminations, although revealing nothing by his manner, Louis soon after went up to his room, professedly to write letters, emitting a low whistle when he was out of hearing. He of course remembered perfectly well to whom he had given the corals, and resolved to seek out Tabitha the next morning to ascertain whether she could possibly have owned such a trinket as well as his sister—which at present he very greatly doubted, though fervently hoping that she might

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE effect upon Swithin of the interview with the bishop had been a very marked one. He had felt that he had good ground for resenting that dignitary's tone in haughtily assuming that all must be sinful which at the first blush appeared to be so to his eyes, and in narrowly refusing a young man the benefit of a single doubt. Swithin's assurance that he would be able to explain all some day was taken in contemptuous incredulity.

"He may be as virtuous as his prototype Timothy; but he's an opinionated old fogy all the same," said St. Cleeve, petulantly.

Yet, on the other hand, Swithin's nature was so fresh and ingenuous, notwithstanding that recent affairs had somewhat denaturalized him, that for a man in the bishop's position to think him immoral was almost as overwhelming as if he had actually been so, and at moments he could scarcely bear existence under so gross a suspicion. What was his union with Lady Constantine worth to him when, by reason of it, he was thought a reprobate by almost the only living man who had professed to take an interest in him? Certainly, by contrast with his air-built image of himself as a worthy astronomer, received by all the world, and the envied husband of Viviette, the present imputation was humiliating. The glorious light of this tender and refined passion seemed to have become debased to burlesque hues by pure accident, and his æsthetic no less than his ethic taste was offended by such an anticlimax. He who had soared amid the remotest grandeurs of nature had been taken to task on a rudimentary question of morals, which had never been a question with him at all. This was what the

exigencies of an awkward attachment had brought him to; but he blamed the circumstances, and not for one moment Lady Constantine.

Having now set his heart against a longer concealment, he was disposed to think that an excellent way of beginning a revelation of their marriage would be by writing a confidential letter to the bishop, detailing the whole case. But it was impossible to do this on his own responsibility. He still recognized the understanding entered into with Viviette before the marriage to be as binding as ever—namely, that the initiative in disclosing their union should come from her. Yet he hardly doubted that she would take that initiative when he told her of his extraordinary reprimand in the churchyard.

This was what he had come to do when Louis saw him standing at the window. But before he had said half a dozen words to Viviette she motioned to him to go on, which he mechanically did, ere he could sufficiently collect his thoughts on its advisability or otherwise. He did not, however, go far. While Louis and his sister were discussing him in the drawing-room he lingered, musing, in the church-yard, hoping that she might be able to escape, and join him in the consultation he so earnestly desired.

This she was at last enabled to do. As soon as Louis had left the room, and shut himself in up-stairs, she ran out by the window in the direction Swithin had taken. When her footsteps began crunching on the gravel he came forward from the church-yard door.

They embraced each other in haste, and then, in a few short, panting words she explained to him that her brother had heard and witnessed the interview on that spot between himself and the bishop, and had told her the substance of the bishop's accusation, not knowing she was the woman in the cabin. "And what I cannot understand is this," she added: "how did the bishop discover that the person behind the bed-curtain was a woman, and not a man?"

"Why," exclaimed Swithin, "in addition to seeing the curtains move he unluckily found on the bed one

of the bracelets I gave you, which you accidentally left there. He brought it to me in the church-yard."

"Oh, Swithin, what do you say? Found the coral bracelet? What did you do with it?"

Swithin clapped his hand to his pocket. "Dear mé! I recollect—I left it where it lay, on Reuben Heath's tombstone."

"Oh, my dear—dear Swithin!" she exclaimed, miserably. "You have compromised me by your forgetfullness! I have claimed the bracelet as mine. My brother did not tell me that the bishop brought it from the cabin. What can I do, that neither the bishop nor my brother may conclude I was the woman there?"

"But if we announce our marriage—"

"Even as your wife, the position was undignified—too I don't know what—for me ever to admit that I was there. Right or wrong, I must declare the bracelet was not mine. Such an escapade—why, it would make me ridiculous in the county; and anything rather than that."

"I was in hope that you would agree to let our marriage be known," said Swithin, with some disappointment. "I thought that these circumstances would make the reason for doing so doubly strong."

"Yes. But there are, alas, reasons against it still stronger! Let me have my way."

"Certainly, dearest. I promised that before you agreed to be mine. My reputation—what is it? Perhaps I shall be dead and forgotten before the next transit of Venus!"

She soothed him tenderly, but could not tell him why she felt the reasons against any announcement as yet to be stronger than those in favor of it. How could she, when her feeling had been cautiously fed and developed by her brother Louis' unvarnished exhibition of Swithin's material position in the eyes of the world?—that of a young man, the scion of a family of farmers recently her tenants, living at the homestead with his grandmother, Mrs. Martin. That this objection, at present so strong to her, was only temporary, she quite believed, and was as convinced of his

coming success as ever; praying and hoping for it on his account not less than her own. She hoped all the more earnestly from an occasional twinge of conscience on the question whether his marriage with her had been so greatly for his good as they continually assumed it to be. She could not be blind to the fact that she had agreed to the step as much for her own pleasure as from a disinterested wish to release his mind from a distraction which was fatal to his studies; that had Swithin never seen her, it would probably have been far better for him and his prospects, since she had brought him no solid help as yet, either in wealth or friends.

To soften her refusal, she said in declaring it: "One concession, Swithin, I certainly will make. I will see you oftener. I will come to the cabin and tower frequently; and will contrive, too, that you come to the house occasionally. During the last winter we passed whole weeks without meeting; don't let us allow that to happen again."

"Very well, dearest," said Swithin, good humoredly. "I don't care so terribly much for the old man's opinion of me, after all. For the present, then, let things be as they are."

Nevertheless, the youth felt her refusal more than he owned; but an unequal temperament like Swithin's, so soon depressed on his own account, was also soon to recover on hers, and it was with almost a child's forgetfulness of the past that he took her view of the case.

When he was gone she hastily re-entered the house. Her brother had not reappeared from up-stairs; but she was informed that Tabitha Lark was waiting to see her, if her ladship would pardon the said Tabitha for coming so late. Lady Constantine made no objection, and saw the young girl at once.

When Lady Constantine entered the waiting-room, behold, in Tabitha's outstretched hand lay the coral ornament which had been causing Viviette so much anxiety.

"I guessed, on second thoughts, that it was yours,

my lady," said Tabitha, with rather a frightened face, "and so I have brought it back."

"But how did you come by it, Tabitha?"

"Mr. Glanville gave it to me; he must have thought it was mine. I took it, fancying at the moment that he handed it to me because I happened to come by first after he had found it."

Lady Constantine saw how the situation might be improved so as to effect her deliverance from this troublesome little web of evidence.

"Oh, you can keep it," she said, brightly. "It was very good of you to bring it back. But keep it for your very own. Take Mr. Glanville at his word, and don't explain. And, Tabitha, divide the strands into two bracelets; there are enough of them to make a pair."

The next morning, in pursuance of his resolution, Louis wandered around the grounds till he saw the girl for whom he was waiting enter the church. He accosted her over the wall. But, puzzling to view, a coral bracelet blushed on each of her young arms, for she had promptly carried out the suggestion of Lady Constantine.

"You are wearing it, I see, Tabitha, with the other," he murmured. "Then you mean to keep it?"

"Yes, I mean to keep it."

"You are sure it is not Lady Constantine's? I find she had one like it."

"Quite sure. But you had better take it to her, sir, and ask her," said the saucy girl.

"Oh, no; that's not necessary," replied Louis, considerably shaken in his convictions.

When Louis met his sister, a short time after, he did not catch her, as he had intended to do, by saying suddenly: "I have found your bracelet. I know who has got it."

"You cannot have found it," she replied quietly, 'for I have discovered that it was never lost," and stretching out both her hands she revealed one on each, Viviette having performed the same operation

with her remaining bracelet that she had advised Tabitha to do with the other.

Louis was mystified, but by no means convinced. In spite of this attempt to hoodwink him, his mind returned to the subject every hour of the day. There was no doubt that either Tabitha or Viviette had been with Swithin in the cabin. He recapitulated every case that had occurred during his visit to Welland in which his sister's manner had been of a color to justify the suspicion that it was she. There was that strange incident in the corridor, when she had screamed at what she described to be a shadowy resemblance to her late husband; how very improbable that this fancy should have been the only cause of her agitation! Then he had noticed, during Swithin's confirmation, a blush upon her cheek when he passed her, on his way to the bishop, and the fervor in her glance during the few moments of the imposition. Then he suddenly recalled the night at the railway station, when the accident with the whip took place, and how, when he had reached Welland House, an hour later, he had found no Viviette there. Running thus from incident to incident, he increased his suspicions without being able to cull from the circumstances anything amounting to evidence; but evidence he now determined to acquire without saying a word to any one.

His plan was a cruel one; to set a trap into which the pair would blindly walk, if any secret understanding existed between them of the nature he suspected.

CHAPTER XXX.

HE began by calling at the tower one afternoon, as if by accident. After a friendly chat with Swithin, whom he found there (having watched him enter), Louis invited the young man to dine the same evening at the house, that he might have an opportunity of showing him some interesting old scientific works in folio, that, according to Louis' account, he had stumbled on in overhauling the library. Louis set no great bait for St. Cleeve in this statement, for old science is not old art, which, having perfected itself, has died and left its secrets hidden in its remains. But Swithin was a responsive fellow, and readily agreed to come; being, moreover, always glad of a chance of meeting Viviette *en famille*. Besides, he hoped to tell her of a scheme which had lately suggested itself to him as likely to benefit them both: that he should go away for awhile, and endeavor to raise sufficient funds to visit the great observatories of Europe, possibly with a view to obtaining a post in one of them. Hitherto the only bar to the plan had been the exceeding narrowness of his income, which, though sufficient for his present life, was absolutely inadequate for the requirements of a traveling astronomer.

Meanwhile, Louis Glanville had returned to the house, and told his sister in the most innocent manner that he had been in the company of St. Cleeve that afternoon, getting a few useful wrinkles on astronomy; that they had grown so friendly over the fascinating subject as to leave him no alternative but to invite St. Cleeve to dine at Welland the same evening, with a view to certain researches in the library afterward. "I could quite make allowances for any youthful errors into which the young man may have been betrayed," he continued, sententiously, "since, for a

scientist, he is really admirable. No doubt the bishop's caution will not be lost upon him; and as for his birth and connections—those he can't help."

Lady Constantine showed such alacrity in adopting the idea of having Swithin to dinner, and she ignored his "youthful errors" so completely, as almost to betray herself. In fulfillment of her promise to see him oftener, she had been intending to run across to Swithin on that identical evening. Now the trouble would be saved in a very delightful way, by the exercise of a little hospitality, which Viviette herself would not have dared to suggest.

Dinner-time came, and with it Swithin, exhibiting rather a blushing and nervous manner, that was, unfortunately, more likely to betray their cause than was Viviette's own more practiced bearing. Throughout the meal Louis sat in his chair like a spider in the corner of his web, observing them narrowly, and at moments flinging out an artful thread, here and there, with the same view to their entanglement. But they passed through the ordeal marvelously well. Perhaps the actual tie between them, through being so much closer and of so much more practical a nature than even their critic supposed it, was in itself a protection against their exhibiting that ultra-reciprocity of manner which, had they been merely lovers, might have betrayed them.

But Louis' scheme was as yet only half developed. After dinner the trio duly adjourned to the library, as had been planned, and the volumes were brought forth by Louis with the zest of a bibliophilist. Swithin had seen most of them before, and thought but little of them; but the pleasure of staying in the house made him welcome any reason for doing so, and he willingly looked at whatever was put before him, from Bertius' Ptolemy to Rees' Cyclopædia. The evening thus passed away, and it began to grow late. Swithin, who, among other things, had planned to go to Greenwich next day, to view the Royal Observatory, would start up and prepare to leave for home, every now and then, when Glanville would unearth

some other volume, and so detain him yet another half hour.

"By George!" he said, looking at the clock, when Swithin was at last really about to depart. "I didn't know it was so late. Why not stay here to-night, St. Cleeve? It is very dark, and the way to your place is an awkward cross-cut over the fields."

"It would not inconvenience us at all, Mr. St. Cleeve, if you would care to stay," said Lady Constantine.

"I am afraid—the fact is, I wanted to take an observation at twenty minutes past two"—began Swithin.

"Oh, now, never mind your observations," said Louis. "That's only an excuse. Do that to-morrow night. Now you will stay. It is settled. Viviette, say he must stay, and we'll have another hour of these charming intellectual researches."

Viviette was entrapped with delightful ease into a furtherance of Louis' scheme. "Do stay, Mr. St. Cleeve!" she said, sweetly.

"Well, in truth, I can do without the observation," replied the young man, as he gave way. "It is not of the greatest consequence."

Thus it was arranged; but the researches among the tomes were not prolonged to the extent that Louis had suggested. In three quarters of an hour from that time they had all retired to their respective rooms; Lady Constantine's being on one side of the west corridor, Swithin's opposite, and Louis' at the further end.

Louis, however, was never more broadly awake in his life than now, when he was believed to be composing himself for sleep. Had a person followed him when he withdrew, that watcher would have discovered, on peeping through the keyhole of his door, that he was engaged in one of the oddest of occupations for such a man—that of sweeping down from the ceiling, by means of a walking-cane, a long cobweb which lingered on high in the corner. Keeping it stretched upon the cane, he gently opened the door, and set the

candle in such a position on the mat that the light shone down the corridor. Thus guided by its rays, he passed out slipperless, till he reached the door of St. Cleeve's room, where he applied the dangling spider's thread in such a manner that it stretched across, like a tight-rope, from jamb to jamb, barring, in its fragile way, entrance and egress. This operation completed, he retired again, and, extinguishing his light, went through his bedroom window out upon the flat roof of the portico, to which it gave access.

Here Louis made himself comfortable in his chair and smoking-cap, enjoying the fragrance of a cigar for something like half-an-hour. His position commanded a view of the two windows of Lady Constantine's room, and from these a dim light shone continuously. Having the window partly open at his back, and the door of his room also scarcely closed, his ear retained a fair command of any sounds within the corridor that might be caused by meeting and whispering lovers. In due time certain sounds from that quarter actually became audible; whereupon, returning to his room, he re-entered the corridor, and listened intently. All was silent again, and darkness reigned from end to end. Glanville, however, groped his way along the passage till he again reached Swithin's door, where he examined, by the light of a wax-match he had brought, the condition of the spider's thread. It was gone; somebody had carried it off bodily, as Samson carried off the pin and the web. In other words, a person had passed through the door.

Still holding the faint wax-light in his hand, Louis turned to the door of Lady Constantine's chamber, where he observed first that, though it was pushed together so as to appear fastened to cursory view, the door was not really closed by about a quarter of an inch. This being all he wished to see, he dropped his light, and extinguished it with his foot. Listening, he heard a voice within—Viviette's voice, in a subdued murmur, though speaking earnestly. Without any hesitation, Louis then returned to Swithin's door,

opened it, and walked in. The starlight from without was sufficient, now that his eye had become accustomed to the darkness, to reveal that the room was unoccupied, and that nothing therein had been disturbed.

The worthy gentleman's plot was now complete. With a heavy tread he came forth, walked loudly across the corridor, knocked at Lady Constantine's door, and called "Viviette!"

She heard him instantly, replying "Yes," in startled tones. Immediately afterwards she opened the door, and confronted him in her dressing-gown, with a light in her hand. "What is the matter, Louis?" she said.

"I am greatly alarmed. Our visitor is missing."

"Missing? What! Mr. St. Cleeve?"

"Yes. I was sitting up to finish a cigar, when I thought I heard a noise in this direction. On coming to his room, I find he is not there."

"Good Heaven! I wonder what has happened!" she exclaimed, in apparently intense alarm.

"I wonder," said Glanville, grimly.

"Suppose he is a somnambulist! If so, he may have gone out and broken his neck. I have never heard that he is one, but they say that sleeping in strange places disturbs the mind of people who are given to that sort of thing, and provokes them to it."

"Unfortunately for your theory, his bed has not been touched."

"Oh, what then can it be?"

Her brother looked her full in the face. "Viviette!" he said, sternly.

She seemed puzzled. "Well?" she replied, in simple tones.

"I heard voices in your room," he continued.

"Voices?"

"A voice—yours."

"Yes, you may have done so. It was mine."

"A listener is required for a speaker."

"True, Louis."

"Well, to whom were you speaking?"

"God."

"Viviette! I am ashamed of you."

"I was saying my prayers."

"Prayers!—to God! To St. Swithin, rather!"

"What do you mean, Louis?" she asked, flushing up warm, and drawing back from him. "It was a form of prayer I use, particularly when I am in trouble. It was recommended to me by the bishop, and Mr. Torkingham commends it very highly."

"On your honor, if you have any," he said, bitterly, "whom have you there in your room?"

"No human being."

"Flatly, I don't believe you."

She gave a dignified little bow, and, waving her hand into the apartment, said: "Very well; then search and see."

Louis entered, and glanced round the room, behind the curtains, under the bed, out of the window—a view from which showed that escape thence would have been impossible—everywhere, in short, capable or incapable of affording a retreat to humanity; but discovered nobody. All he observed was that a light stood on the low table by her bedside; that on the bed lay an open prayer book, the counterpane being unpressed, except into a little pit beside the prayer book, apparently where her head had rested in kneeling.

"But where is St. Cleeve?" he said, turning in bewilderment from these evidences of innocent devotion.

"Where can he be?" she chimed in, with real distress. "I should so much like to know. Look about for him. I am quite uneasy!"

"I will, on one condition: that you own that you love him."

"Why should you force me to that?" she murmured. "It would be no such wonder if I did."

"Come, you do."

"Well, I do."

"Now I'll look for him. Tabitha Lark doesn't stay in the house, does she?"

"No."

Louis took a light, and turned away, astonished that his sister had not indignantly resented his intrusion and the nature of his questioning, if she was so innocent as she seemed!

At this moment a slight noise was heard on the staircase, and they could see a figure rising step by step, and coming forward against the long lights of the staircase window. It was Swithin, in his ordinary dress, and carrying his boots in his hand. When he beheld them standing there so motionless, he looked rather disconcerted, but came on towards his room.

Lady Constantine was too much agitated to speak, but Louis said: "I am glad to see you again. Hearing a noise, a few minutes ago, I came out to learn what it could be. I found you absent, and we have been very much alarmed."

"I am very sorry," said Swithin, with contrition. "I owe you a hundred apologies: but the truth is that on entering my bedroom I found the sky remarkably clear, and though I told you that the observation I was to make was of no great consequence, on thinking it over alone I felt it ought not to be allowed to pass; so I was tempted to run across to the observatory, and make it, as I had hoped, without disturbing anybody. If I had known that I should alarm you, I would not have done it for the world."

Swithin spoke very earnestly to Louis, and did not observe the tender reproach in Viviette's eyes, when he showed by his tale his decided notion that the prime use of starlight nights was in the furtherance of practical astronomy.

Everything being now satisfactorily explained, the three retired to their several chambers, and Louis heard no more noises that night, or rather morning; his attempts to solve the mystery of Viviette's life here and her relations with St. Cleeve having thus far resulted chiefly in perplexity. True, an admission had been wrung from her; and even without such an

admission, it was clear that she had a tender feeling for Swithin. How to extinguish that romantic folly it now became his object to consider.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SWITHIN'S midnight excursion to the tower in the cause of science led him to oversleep himself, and when the brother and sister met at breakfast in the morning he did not appear.

"Don't disturb him—don't disturb him," said Louis, laconically. "Hullo, Viviette, what are you reading there that makes you flame up so?"

She was glancing over a letter that she had just opened, and at his words looked up with misgiving. The incident of the previous night left her in great doubt as to what her bearing towards him ought to be. She had made no show of resenting his conduct at the time, from a momentary supposition that he must know all her secret; and afterwards, finding that he did not know it, it seemed too late to affect indignation at his suspicions. So she preserved a quiet neutrality. Even had she resolved on an artificial part, she might have forgotten to play it at this instant, the letter being of a kind to banish previous considerations.

"It is a letter from Bishop Helmsdale," she faltered.

"Well done! I hope, for your sake, it is an offer."

"That's just what it is."

"No—surely?" said Louis, beginning a laugh of surprise.

"Yes," she returned, indifferently. "You can read it, if you like."

"I don't wish to pry into a communication of that sort."

"Oh, you can read it," she said, tossing the letter across to him.

Louis thereupon read as under:

THE PALACE, MELCHESTER,
June 28, 18—.

MY DEAR LADY CONSTANTINE: During the two or three weeks that have elapsed since I experienced the great pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with you, the varied agitation of my feelings has clearly proved that my only course is to address you by letter, and at once. Whether the subject of my communication be acceptable to you or not, I can at least assure you that to suppress it would be far less than natural, and upon the whole less advisable, than to speak out frankly, even if afterwards I hold my peace forever.

The great change in my experience during the past year or two—the change, that is, which has resulted from my advancement to a bishopric—has frequently suggested to me, of late, that a discontinuance in my domestic life of the solitude of past years was a question which ought to be seriously contemplated. But whether I should ever have contemplated it without the great good fortune of my meeting with you is doubtful. However, the thing has been considered at last, and without more ado I candidly ask if you would be willing to give up your life at Welland, and relieve my household loneliness here by becoming my wife.

I am far from desiring to force a hurried decision on your part, and will wait your good pleasure patiently, should you feel any uncertainty at the moment as to the step. I am quite disqualified, by habits and experience, for the delightful procedure of urging my suit in the ardent terms which would be so appropriate towards such a lady, and so expressive of my inmost feelings. In truth, a prosy cleric of five-and-forty wants encouragement to make him eloquent. Of this, however, I can assure you: that if admiration, esteem, and devotion can compensate in any way for the lack of those qualities which might be found to burn with more outward brightness in a younger man, those it is in my power to bestow for the term of my earthly life. Your steady adherence to church principles and your interest in ecclesiastical policy (as was shown by your bright questioning on those subjects

during our morning walk round your grounds) have indicated strongly to me the grace and appropriateness with which you would fill the position of a bishop's wife, and how greatly you would add to his reputation, should you be disposed to honor him with your hand. Formerly there have been times when I was of opinion—and you will rightly appreciate my candor in owning it—that a wife was an impediment to a bishop's due activities; but constant observation has convinced me that, far from this being the truth, a meet consort infuses life into episcopal influence and teaching.

Should you reply in the affirmative I will at once come to see you, and with your permission will, among other things, show you a few plain, practical rules which I have interested myself in drawing up for our future guidance. Should you refuse to change your condition on my account, your decision will, as I need hardly say, be a great blow to me. In any event, I could not do less than I have done, after giving the subject my full consideration. Even if there be a slight deficiency of warmth on your part, my earnest hope is that a mind comprehensive as yours will perceive the immense power for good that you might exercise in the position in which a union with me would place you, and allow that perception to weigh in determining your answer.

I remain, dear Lady Constantine, with the highest respect and affection,

Yours always,

C. MELCHESTER.

"Well, you will not have the foolhardiness to decline, now that the question has actually been popped, I should hope," said Louis, when he had done reading.

"Certainly I shall," she replied.

"You will really be such a fool, Viviette?"

"You speak without much compliment. I have not the least idea of accepting him."

"Surely you will not let your infatuation for that

young fellow carry you so far, after my acquainting you with the shady side of his character? You call yourself a religious woman, say your prayers out loud, follow up the revived methods in church practice, and what not; and yet you can think with partiality of a person who, far from having any religion in him, breaks the most elementary commandments in the decalogue."

"I cannot agree with you," she said, turning her face askance, for she knew not how much of her brother's language was real, and how much assumed, the extent of his discoveries with regard to her secret ties being a mystery. At moments she was disposed to declare the whole truth, and have done with it. But she hesitated, and left the words unsaid; and Louis continued his breakfast in silence.

When he had finished, and she had eaten little or nothing, he asked once more: "How do you intend to answer that letter? Here you are, the poorest woman in the county, abandoned by people who used to be glad to know you, and leading a life as dismal and dreary as a nun's, when an opportunity is offered you of leaping at once into a leading position in this part of England. Bishops are given to hospitality; you would be welcomed everywhere. In short, your answer must be yes."

"And yet it will be no," she said, in a low voice. She had at last learnt, from the tone of her brother's latter remarks, that at any rate he had no knowledge of her actual marriage, whatever the indirect tie of which he might suspect her guilty.

Louis could restrain himself no longer at her answer. "Then conduct your affairs your own way. I know you to be leading a life that won't bear investigation, and I'm damned if I'll stay here any longer."

Saying which, Granville jerked back his chair, and strode out of the room. In less than a quarter of an hour, and before she had moved a step from the table, she heard him leaving the house.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT to do she could not tell. The step to which Swithin had entreated her, objectionable and premature as it had seemed, in a social aspect, would at all events have saved her from this dilemma. Had she allowed him to tell the bishop his simple story in its fullness, who could say but that that dignitary might have generously bridled his own impulses, entered into the case with sympathy, and forwarded with zest their designs for the future, owing to his interest of old in Swithin's father, and in the naturally attractive features of the young man's career.

A puff of wind from the open window, wafting the bishop's letter to the floor, aroused her from her revery. With a sigh she stooped and picked it up, glanced at it again, then arose, and with the deliberateness of predetermined purpose, wrote her reply:—

WELLAND HOUSE, June 29, 18—.

MY DEAR BISHOP OF MELCHESTER—I confess to you that your letter, so gracious and flattering as it is, has taken your friend somewhat unawares. There is no one in the world who esteems your high qualities more than myself, or who has greater faith in your ability to adorn the episcopal seat that you have been called on to fill. But to your question I can give only one reply, and that is an unqualified negative. To state this unavoidable decision distresses me without affectation; and I trust you will believe that, though I decline the distinction of becoming your wife, I shall never cease to interest myself in all that pertains to you and your office; and shall feel the keenest regret

if this refusal should interfere to prevent a lifelong friendship between us.

I am, my dear Bishop of Melchester,
Ever sincerely yours,
VIVIETTE ——.

"Viviette what?" she exclaimed to herself hopelessly, as she flung down the pen. A sudden revulsion from the subterfuge of signing herself "Viviette Constantine," in a letter of this serious sort, and the impracticability of using another signature for the present, wrought in her mind a feeling of dissatisfaction with the whole epistle, and pushing it aside she allowed it to remain unfinished. In a few minutes she heard Swithin approaching, when she put the letter out of the way, and turned to receive him.

Swithin entered quietly, and looked round the room. Seeing, with unexpected pleasure, that she was there alone, he came over and kissed her. Her discomposure at some foregone event was soon obvious. "Has my staying caused you any trouble?" he asked, in a whisper. "Where is your brother, this morning?"

She smiled through her perplexity as she took his hand. "The oddest things happen to me, dear Swithin," she said. "Do you wish particularly to know what has happened?"

"Yes, if you don't mind telling me."

"I do mind telling you. Among other things, I am resolving to give way to your representations—in part, at least. It will be best to tell the bishop everything, and my brother, if not other people."

"I am truly glad to hear it, Viviette," said he, cheerfully. "I have felt for a long time that honesty is the best policy."

"I at any rate feel it now. But it is a policy that requires a great deal of courage!"

"It certainly requires some courage—I should not say a great deal; and, indeed, as far as I am concerned, it demands less courage to speak out than to hold my tongue."

"But, you silly boy, you don't know what has hap-

pened. The bishop has made me an offer of marriage."

"Good gracious, what an impertinent old man! What have you done about it, dearest?"

"Well, I have hardly accepted him," she replied, laughing. "It is this event which has suggested to me that I make my refusal a reason for confiding our situation to him."

"What would you have done had you not been already appropriated?"

"That's an inscrutable mystery. He is a worthy man; but he has very pronounced views about his own position, and some other undesirable qualities. Still, who knows? You must bless your stars that you have secured me. Now let us consider how to draw up our confession to him. I wish I had listened to you at the first, and allowed you to take him into our confidence before his declaration arrived. He may possibly resent the concealment now. However, this cannot be helped."

"I tell you what, Viviette," said Swithin, after a thoughtful pause. "If the bishop is such a sort of man as this, a man who goes falling in love, and wanting to marry you, and so on, I am not disposed to confess anything to him at all. I fancied him altogether different from that."

"But he's none the worse for it, dear."

"I think he is—to lecture me and love you all in one breath."

"Still, that's only a passing phase, and you first proposed making a confidant of him."

"I did. . . . Very well. Then we are to tell nobody but the bishop?"

"And my brother Louis. I must tell him; it is unavoidable. He suspects me in a way I could never have credited of him."

Swithin, as was before stated, had arranged to start for Greenwich that morning, permission having been accorded to him by the Astronomer-Royal, to view the Observatory; and their final decision was that, as he could not afford time to sit down with her, and

write to the bishop in collaboration, each should, during the day, compose a well-considered letter, disclosing their position from his and her own point of view; Lady Constantine leading up to her confession by her refusal of the bishop's hand. It was necessary that she should know what Swithin contemplated saying, that her statements might precisely harmonize. He ultimately agreed to send her his letter by the next morning's post, when, having read it, she would in due course dispatch it with her own.

As soon as he had breakfasted, Swithin went his way, promising to return from Greenwich by the end of the week. Viviette passed the remainder of that long summer day, during which her husband was receding toward the capital, in an almost motionless state. At some instants she felt exultant at the idea of announcing her marriage, and defying general opinion. At another her heart misgave her, and she was tormented by a fear lest Swithin should some day accuse her of having hampered his deliberately shaped plan of life by her intrusive romanticism. That was often the trick of men who had sealed by marriage in their inexperienced youth a love for those whom their maturer judgment would have rejected as too obviously disproportionate in years.

However, it was now too late for these lugubrious thoughts; and, bracing herself, she began to frame the new reply to Bishop Helmsdale—the plain, unvarnished tale that was to supplant the undivulging answer first written. She was engaged on this difficult production till daylight faded in the west, and the broad-faced moon edged upward, like a disk of old gold, over the elms toward the village. By that time Swithin had reached Greenwich; her brother had gone she knew not where; and she and loneliness dwelt solely, as before, within the walls of Welland House.

At this hour of sunset and moonrise, the new parlor-maid entered, to inform her that Mr. Cecil's head clerk, from Warborne, particularly wished to see her.

Mr. Cecil was her solicitor, and she knew of nothing whatever that required his intervention just at present. But he would not have sent just at this time of day without excellent reasons, and she directed that the young man might be shown in where she was. On his entry, the first thing that she noticed was that in his hand he carried a newspaper.

"In case you should not have seen this evening's paper, Lady Constantine, Mr. Cecil has directed me to bring it to you at once, on account of what appears there in relation to your ladyship. He has only just seen it himself."

"What is it? How does it concern me?"

"I will point it out."

"Read it yourself to me. Though I am afraid there's not enough light."

"I can see very well here," said the lawyer's clerk, stepping to the window; and folding back the paper, he read:

NEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

"'CAPE TOWN, *May* 17, *via* Plymouth.—A correspondent of the *Cape Chronicle* states that he has interviewed an Englishman just arrived from the interior, and learns from him that a considerable misapprehension exists in England concerning the death of the traveler and hunter, Sir Blount Constantine——'"

"Oh, he's living! My husband is alive!" she cried, sinking down in nearly a fainting condition.

"No, my lady. Sir Blount is dead enough, I am sorry to say."

"Dead, did you say?"

"Certainly, Lady Constantine; there is no doubt of it."

She sat up, and her intense relief almost made itself perceptible like a fresh atmosphere in the room. "Yes. Then what did you come for?" she asked calmly.

"That Sir Blount has died is unquestionable," replied the lawyer's clerk, gently. "But there has been some mistake about the date of his death."

"He died of malarious fever on the banks of the Zonga, November 4, 18—."

"No; he only lay ill there a long time it seems. It was a companion who died at that date. But I'll read the account to your ladyship, with your permission:

"'The decease of this somewhat eccentric wanderer did not occur at the time hitherto supposed, but only in last December. The following is the account of the Englishman alluded to, given as nearly as possible in his own words: During the illness of Sir Blount and his friend by the Zonga, three of the servants went away, taking with them a portion of his clothing and effects; and it must be they who spread the report of his death at this time. After his companion's death he mended, and when he was strong enough he and I traveled on to a healthier district. I urged him not to delay his return to England; but he was much against going back there again, and became so rough in manner toward me that we parted company at the first opportunity I could find. I joined a party of white traders returning to the west coast. I stayed here among the Portuguese for many months. I then found that an English traveling party were going to explore a district adjoining that which I had formerly traversed with Sir Blount. They said they would be glad of my services, and I joined them. When we had crossed the territory to the south of Ulunda, and drew near to Marzambo, I heard tidings of a man living there whom I suspected to be Sir Blount, although he was not known by that name. Being so near, I was induced to seek him out, and found that he was indeed the same. He had dropped his old name altogether, and had married a native princess——'"

"Married a native princess?" said Lady Constantine.

"That's what it says, my Lady—'married a native princess according to the rites of the tribe, and was living very happily with her. He told me he should never return to England again. He also told me that, having seen this princess just after I had left him, he

had been attracted by her, and had thereupon decided to reside with her in that country, as being a land which afforded him greater happiness than he could hope to obtain elsewhere. He asked me to stay with him, instead of going on with my party, and not reveal his real title to any of them. After some hesitation I did stay, and was not uncomfortable at first. But I soon found that Sir Blount drank much harder now than when I had known him, and that he was at times very greatly depressed in mind at his position. One morning in February last, I heard a shot from his dwelling. His wife rushed frantically past me, as I hastened to the spot, and when I had entered I found that he had put an end to himself with his revolver. His princess was broken-hearted all that day. When we had buried him, I discovered in his house a little box directed to his solicitors at Warborne, in England, and a note for myself, saying that I had better get the first chance of returning that offered, and requesting me to take the box with me. It is supposed to contain papers and articles for friends in England who have deemed him dead for some time.'"

The clerk stopped his reading, and there was a silence. "Last February," she at length said, in a whisper. "Has the box arrived yet?"

"Not yet, my lady. We have no further proof of anything. As soon as the package arrives to hand you shall know of it immediately."

Such was the clerk's mission, and, leaving the paper with her, he withdrew. The intelligence amounted to this much: That Sir Blount, having been alive till at least ten weeks after her marriage with Swithin St. Cleeve, Swithin St. Cleeve was not her husband in the eye of the law; so that the marriage would have to be repeated, if she wished to become legally that young man's wife.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEXT morning, Viviette received a visit from Mr. Cecil himself. He informed her that the box spoken of by the servant had arrived quite unexpectedly, just after the departure of his clerk on the previous evening. There had not been sufficient time for him thoroughly to examine it as yet, but he had seen enough to enable him to state that it contained letters, dated memoranda in Sir Blount's handwriting, notes referring to events which had happened later than his supposed death, and other irrefragable proofs that the account published in the newspapers was correct—the comparatively recent date of Sir Blount's decease.

She looked up, and spoke with the irresponsible helplessness of a child: "On reviewing the circumstances, I cannot think how I could have allowed myself to believe the first tidings!" she said.

"Everybody else believed them, and why should not you have done so?" said the lawyer.

"How came the will to be permitted to be proved, as there could, after all, have been no complete evidence?" she asked. "If I had been the executrix, I would not have attempted it. As I was not, I know very little about how the business was pushed through. In a very unseemly way, I think."

"Well, no," said Mr. Cecil, feeling himself called upon to defend law practice from such imputations, whatever might be its defects in the present instance. "It was done in the way customary in all cases where the proof of death is only presumptive. The evidence, such as it was, was laid before the court by the applicants, your husband's cousins, and the servants who had been with him deposed to his death with a particularity that was deemed sufficient. Their error was,

not that somebody died—for somebody did die at the time affirmed—but that they mistook one person for another; the person who died not being Sir Blount Constantine. The court was of opinion that the evidence led up to a reasonable inference that the deceased was actually Sir Blount, and probate was granted on the strength of it. As there was a doubt about the exact day of the month, the applicants were allowed to swear that he died on or after the date last given of his existence—which, in spite of their error then, has really come true now, of course."

"They little think what they have done to me by being so ready to swear!" she murmured.

Mr. Cecil, supposing her to allude only to the pecuniary straits in which she had been prematurely placed by the will taking effect a year before its due time, said: "True. It has been to your ladyship's loss, and to their gain. But they will make ample restitution, no doubt; and all will be wound up satisfactorily."

Lady Constantine was far from explaining that this was not her meaning, and after some further consultation of a purely technical nature, Mr. Cecil left her presence.

When she was again unencumbered with the necessity of exhibiting a proper bearing, the sense that she had greatly suffered in pocket by the undue haste of the executors weighed upon her mind with a pressure quite inappreciable beside the greater gravity of her personal position. What was her situation as a legatee to her situation as a woman! Her face crimsoned with a flush which she was almost ashamed to show to the daylight, as she hastily penned the following note to Swithin at Greenwich—certainly one of the most informal documents she had ever written:

WELLAND, *Thursday.*

O Swithin, my dear Swithin, what I have to tell you is so sad and humiliating that I can hardly write it, and yet I must! Though we are dearer to each other than all the world beside, and as firmly united as if we were one, I am not legally your wife. Sir Blount

did not die till some time after we in England supposed. The service must be repeated instantly. I have not been able to sleep all night. I feel so wrong and unseemly that I can scarcely collect my thoughts. The newspaper sent with this will explain, if you have not seen particulars. Do come to me as soon as you can, that we may consult on what to do. Burn this at once. Your VIVIETTE.

When the note had been dispatched, she remembered that there was another hardly less important question to be answered—the proposal of the bishop for her hand. His communication had sunk into nothingness beside the momentous news that had so greatly distressed her. The two replies lay before her; the one she had first written, simply declining to become Dr. Helmsdale's wife without giving reasons; the second, which she had elaborated with so much care on the previous day, relating in confidential detail the history of her love for Swithin, their secret marriage, and their hopes for the future—asking his advice on what their procedure should be to escape the strictures of a censorious world. It was the letter she had barely finished writing when Mr. Cecil's clerk announced news tantamount to a declaration that she was no wife at all. This epistle she now destroyed, and with the less reluctance in knowing that Swithin had been somewhat averse to the confession as soon as he found that Bishop Helmsdale was also a victim to tender sentiment concerning her. The first, which she had been unable honestly to sign "Viviette Constantine," and could not openly sign "Viviette St. Cleve," she sadly filled with the former surname, and sent the missive on its way. Strange it was to her, and yet in keeping with the tenor of human affairs, that the difficulty of signing that letter should have resolved itself by the only means which at the time of writing she would have deemed non-existent. There had been a thousand reasons why she should sign "Viviette Constantine," even when believing herself no longer owner of that name; that she should ulti-

mately sign it because it had never ceased to be hers was a result that distanced all conjecture.

The sense of her undefinable position kept her without much repose on the second night also; but the following morning brought an unexpected letter from Swithin, written about the same hour as hers to him, and it comforted her much. He had seen the account in the papers almost as soon as it had come to her knowledge, and now sent this line to reassure her, in the perturbation she must naturally feel. She was not to be alarmed at all. They two were husband and wife in moral intent and antecedent belief, and the legal flaw which accident had so curiously uncovered could be mended in half an hour. He would return on Saturday night at the latest; but as the hour would be far advanced, he would ask her to meet him by slipping out of the house to the tower any time during service on Sunday morning, when there would be few persons about likely to observe them. Meanwhile, he might provisionally state that their best course in the emergency would be, instead of confessing to anybody that there had already been a solemnization of marriage between them, to arrange their remarriage in as open a manner as possible, as if it were the just-reached climax of a sudden affection; prefacing it by a public announcement in the usual way.

This plan of approaching their second union with all the show and circumstances of a new thing recommended itself to her strongly, but for one objection—that by such a course the wedding could not, without appearing like an act of unseemly haste, take place so quickly as she desired for her own peace of mind. It might occur somewhat early, say in the course of a month or two, without bringing down upon her the charge of levity: for Sir Blount, a notoriously unkind husband to her, had been out of her sight four or five years, and in his grave nearly one. But what she naturally desired was that there should be no more delay than was positively necessary for obtaining a new license—two or three days at longest; and in view of this celerity it was next to impossible to make due

preparation for a wedding of ordinary publicity, performed in her own church, from her own house, with a feast and amusements for the villagers, a tea for the school-children, a bonfire, and other of those proclamatory accessories which, by meeting wonder halfway, deprives it of much of its intensity. It must be admitted, too, that she even now shrank from the shock of surprise that would inevitably be caused by her openly taking for her husband such a mere youth as Swithin still appeared, notwithstanding that in years he was by this time within a trifle of one and twenty.

The straightforward course had, nevertheless, so much to recommend it, and so well avoided the disadvantage of future revolution which a private repetition of the ceremony would entail, that, assuming she could depend upon Swithin, as she knew she could do, good sense counseled its serious consideration. She became more composed at her queer situation: hour after hour passed, and the first spasmodic impulse of womanly decorum not to let the sun go down upon her present state was quite controllable. She could regard the strange contingency that had arisen with something like philosophy. The day slipped by: she thought of the awkwardness of the accident rather than of its humiliation; and, loving Swithin now in a far calmer spirit than at a past date, when they had for the first time rushed into each others arms and vowed to be one, she ever and anon caught herself reflecting: "Were it not that, for my honor's sake, I must remarry him, I should perhaps be a nobler woman in not allowing him to hamper his bright future by a union with me at all."

This thought, at first artificially entertained as little more than a mental exercise, became by stages a genuine conviction; and while her heart enforced, her reason regretted the necessity of abstaining from self sacrifice—the being obliged, despite his curious escape from the attempt, to lime Swithin's young wings again solely for her credit's sake.

However, the deed had been done: Swithin was to

be made legally hers. Selfishness in a conjecture of this sort was excusable, and even obligatory. Taking brighter views, she allowed herself to hope that upon the whole the yoking of the young fellow with her, a portionless woman and his senior, would not greatly endanger his career. In such a mood night overtook her, and she went to bed reflecting that Swithin had by this time arrived in the parish—was perhaps even at that moment passing homeward beneath her walls —and that in less than twelve hours she would have met him, have ventilated the secret which oppressed her, and have satisfactorily arranged with him the details of their re-union.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SUNDAY morning came, and complicated her previous emotions by bringing with it a new and unexpected shock to mingle with them. The postman had delivered, among other things, an illustrated newspaper, sent by a hand which she did not recognize; and on opening the cover the sheet that met her eyes filled her with horror which she could not express. The print was one which drew largely on its imagination for its engravings, and it already contained an illustration of the death of Sir Blount Constantine. In this work of art he was represented as standing with his pistol to his mouth, his brains being in the act of flying up to the roof of his chamber, and his native princess rushing terror-stricken away to a remote position in the thicket of palms which neighbored the dwelling.

The crude realism of the picture, possibly harmless enough in its effect upon others, naturally overpowered and sickened her. By a curious fascination she would look at it again and again, till every line of the engraver's performance seemed really a transcript from what had happened. For the first time, on these grounds, she felt it to be a trying position that, with

such details so fresh in her thoughts, she was obliged to go out and make arrangements for confirming, by repetition, her marriage with another. No interval was available for serious reflection, or for allowing the softening effects of time to operate in her mind. It was as though her first husband had died that moment, and she were keeping an appointment with another in the presence of his corpse.

So revived was the actuality of Sir Blount's recent life and death by this incident, that the distress of her personal relations with Swithin was the single force in the world which could have coerced her into abandoning to him the interval she would have first set apart for getting over these new and painful impressions of her former husband. Self-pity for ill-usage afforded her good reasons for ceasing to love him, but he was yet too closely intertwined with her past life to be destructible on the instant as a memory.

But there was no choice of occasions for her now, and she listlessly waited for the church bells to cease chiming? When all was still, and the surrounding cottagers had gathered themselves within the walls of the adjacent building, and Tabitha Lark's first voluntary had pealed from the tower window, Lady Constantine left the garden in which she had been loitering, and went towards Rings Hill Speer.

The sense of the situation obscured the morning prospect. The country was unusually silent under the intensifying sun, the songless season of birds having arrived. Choosing her path amid the efts that were basking upon the outer slope of the plantation, she wound her way up the tree-shrouded camp to the wooden cabin in the center. The door was ajar, but on entering she found the place empty. The tower door was also partly open, and, listening at the foot of the stairs, she heard Swithin above, shifting the telescope and wheeling round the rumbling dome, apparrently in preparation for the next nocturnal reconnoiter. There was no doubt that he would descend in a minute or two to look for her, and, not wishing to interrupt him till he was ready, she re-entered the cabin,

and patiently seated herself among the books and papers that lay scattered about.

She did as she had often done before when waiting there for him ; that is, she occupied herself in turning over the papers, and examining the progress of his labors. The notes were mostly astronomical, of course, and she had managed to keep sufficiently abreast of him to catch the meaning of a good many of these. The litter on the table, however, was somewhat more profuse and miscellaneous in character this morning, as if the papers had been hurriedly overhauled. Among the rest of the sheets lay an open note, which, in the entire confidence that existed between them, she glanced over and read as a matter of course.

It was a most business-like communication, and beyond the address and date contained only the following words :

DEAR SIR,—We beg leave to draw your attention to a lteter we addressed to you on the 26th ult., to which we have not yet been favored with a reply. As the time for the payment of the first moiety of your four hundred pounds per annum, settled on you by your late uncle, is now at hand, we should be obliged by your giving directions as to where and in what manner the money is to be handed over to you, and shall also be glad to receive any other definite instructions from you with regard to the future.

We are, dear sir, yours faithfully,

HANNER & RAWLES.

Swithin St. Cleeve, Esq.

An income of four hundred a year for Swithin, whom she had hitherto understood to be possessed of an annuity of eighty pounds at the outside, with no prospect of increasing the sum except by hard work ! What could this communication mean ? He, whose custom and delight it was to tell her all his heart, had not breathed a syllable of this matter to her, though it met the very difficulty towards which their discussions invariably tend-

ed—how to secure for him a competency which should enable him to establish his pursuits on a wider basis, and throw himself into more direct communion with the scientific world. Quite bewildered by the lack of any explanation, she rose from her seat, and, with the note in her hand, ascended the winding tower steps.

Reaching the upper aperture, she perceived him under the dome, moving musingly about, as if he had never been absent an hour, his light hair frilling out from under the edge of his velvet skull-cap as it had always been wont to do. No question either of marriage or not marriage seemed to be disturbing the mind of this juvenile husband of hers. The be-all and end-all of his existence was apparently before him, namely, the equatorial telescope which he was carefully adjusting by means of screws and clamps, till, hearing her movements, he turned his head.

"Oh, here you are, my dear Viviette! I was just beginning to expect you!" he exclaimed, coming forward. "I ought to have been looking out for you; but I have found a defect here in the instrument and I wanted to set it right before evening came on. It is not a good thing to tinker your glasses, but I have found that the diffraction rings are not perfect circles. I have learnt at Greenwich how to correct them—so kind they have been to me there!—and so I have been loosening the screws of the cell, and gently shifting the glass, till I think that I have at last made illumination equal all around. I have so much to tell you about my visit. One thing is that the astronomical world is getting quite excited about the coming transit of Venus. There is to be a regular expedition fitted out. How I should like to join it!"

He spoke enthusiastically, and his eyes sparkled at the mental image of the said expedition. As it was rather dark in the dome, he rolled it round on its axis till the shuttered slit for the telescope directly faced the morning sun, which thereupon flooded the concave, touched the bright metal work of the equatorial, and lighting up Lady Constantine's pale, troubled face.

"But Swithin," she faltered, "my letter to you—our marriage!"

"Oh yes—this marriage question," he hastily added. "I had not forgotten it, or at least only a few minutes."

"Can you forget it, Swithin, for a moment? Oh; how can you?" she said, reproachfully. "It is such a distressing thing. It drives away all my rest."

"Forgotten is not the word I should have used," he apologized. "Temporarily dismissed it from my mind is all I meant. The simple fact is that the vastness of the field of astronomy reduces every terrestrial thing to atomic dimensions. Do not trouble, dearest. The remedy is quite easy, as I stated in my letter. We can now be married in a prosy, public way. Yes, early or late, next week, next month, six months hence, just as you choose. Say the word when, and I will obey." His face, with its absence of all anxiety or consternation, contrasted strangely with hers, which at last he saw, and, looking at the writing she held, inquired: "But what paper have you in your hand?"

"A letter which to me is actually inexplicable," said she, her curiosity returning to the letter, and overriding for the instant her immediate concern. "What does this income of four hundred a year mean? Why have you never told me about it, dear Swithin? Or does it not refer to you?"

He looked at the note, flushed slightly, and was absoutely unable to begin his reply at once. "I did not mean you to see that, Viviette," he murmured.

"Why not?"

"I thought you had better not, as it does not concern me further, now. The solicitors are laboring under a mistake in supposing that it does. I have to write at once and inform them that the annuity is not mine to receive."

"What a strange mystery in your life!" she said, forcing a perplexed smile. "Something to balance the tragedy in mine. I am absolutely in the dark as to your past history, it seems. And yet I had thought you told me everything."

"I could not tell you that, Viviette, because it would

have endangered our relations—though not in the way you may suppose. You would have reproved me—you, who are so generous and noble, would have forbidden me to do what I did ; and I was determined not to be forbidden."

"To do what?"

"To marry you."

"Why should I have forbidden?"

"Must I tell—what I would not?" he said, placing his hands upon her shoulders, and looking sadly at her. "Well, perhaps, since it has come to this, you ought to know, since it can make no possible difference in my intentions now. We are one forever, legal blunders notwithstanding—for happily they are quickly reparable—and this question of a devise from my Uncle Jocelyn concerned me only when I was a single man."

Thereupon, with obviously no consideration of the possibilities that were reopened by the nullity of their marriage contract, he related in detail, and not without misgiving for having concealed them so long, the events that had occurred on the morning of their wedding-day ; how he had met the postman on the way to Warborne, after dressing in the cabin, and how he had received from him the letter from his dead uncle through his family lawyers, informing him of the bequest, and of the important condition attached—that he should remain unmarried until his five-and-twentieth year ; how, in comparison with the possession of her dear self, he had reckoned the income as nought, abandoned all idea of it there and then, and had come on to the wedding as if nothing had happened to interrupt for a moment the working out of their plan ; how he had scarcely thought with any closeness of the circumstances of the case since, until reminded of them by this note she had seen, and a previous one of the sort, received from the same solicitors.

"Oh, Swithin, Swithin!" she cried, bursting into tears as she realized it all, and sinking on the observing-chair. "I have ruined you—yes, I have ruined you!"

The young man was dismayed by her grief, and endeavored to soothe her; but she seemed shaken by a poignant remorse, which would not be comforted.

"And now," she continued, as soon as she could speak, "when you are once more free, and in a position —actually in a position to claim the annuity that would be the making of you, I am compelled to come to you, and beseech you to undo yourself again, merely to save me!"

"Not to save you, Viviette, but to bless me. You do not ask me to re-marry; it is not a question of alteratives at all,—it is my straight course. I do not dream of doing otherwise. I should be wretched if you thought for one moment I could entertain the idea of doing otherwise."

But the more he said, the worse he made the matter. It was a state of affairs that would not bear discussion at all, and the unsophisticated view he took of his course seemed to increase her responsibility.

"Why did your uncle attach such a cruel condition to his bounty!" she cried, bitterly. "Oh, he little thinks how hard he hits me from the grave,—me, who have never done him wrong; and you too. Swithin, are you sure that he makes that condition indispensable? Perhaps he meant that you should not marry beneath you; perhaps he did not mean in such a case as your marrying (forgive me for saying it) a little above you."

"There is no doubt that he did not contemplate a case which has led to such happiness as this has done," the youth murmured with hesitation; for though he scarcely remembered a word of his uncle's letter of advice, he had a dim apprehension that it was couched in terms alluding specially to Lady Constantine.

"Are you sure that you cannot retain the money and be my lawful husband too?" she asked, piteously. "Oh, what a wrong I am doing you! I did not dream that it could be as bad as this. I knew I was wasting your time by letting you love me, and hampering your projects; but I thought there were compensating advantages. This wreck of your future by me I did not

contemplate. You are sure there is no escape? Have you this letter with the conditions, or the will? Let me see the letter in which he expresses his wishes."

"I assure you it is all as I say," he pensively returned.

"But how does he put it? How does he justify himself in making such a harsh restriction? Do let me see the letter, Swithin. I shall think it a want of confidence if you do not. I may discover some way out of the difficulty if you let me look at the papers. Eccentric wils can be evaded in all sorts of ways."

Still he hesitated. "I would rather you did not see these papers," he said.

But she persisted, as only a fond woman can. Her knowledge that she, who, as a woman many years his senior, should have shown her love for him by guiding him straight into the paths he aimed at, had (though in some respects unwittingly) blocked his attempted career for her own happiness, made her more intent than ever to find out a device by which she might retain him, while he also retained the life-interest under his uncle's will. Her entreaties were at length too potent for his resistance; and, accompanying her downstairs to the cabin, he opened the desk from which the other papers had been taken, and against his better judgment, handed her the ominous communication of Jocelyn St. Cleeve, which lay in the envelope just as it had been received, three quarters of a year earlier.

"Don't read it now," he said. "Don't spoil our meeting by entering into a subject which is virtually past and done with. Take it with you, and look it over at your leisure,—but merely as an old curiosity, remember, and not as a still possibly operative document. I have almost forgotten what the contents are, beyond the general advice and stipulation that I was to remain a bachelor."

"At any rate," she rejoined, "do not reply to the note I have seen from the solicitors till I have read this also."

He promised. "But now about our public wedding,"

he said! "Like certain royal personages, we have had the religious rite; and now comes the civil contract. Will you fix the day? When is it to be? And shall it take place at a register's office, since there is no necessity for having the sacred part over again?"

"I'll think," replied she. "I'll think it over."

"And let me know as soon as you can, how you decide to proceed."

"I will write to-morrow, or come. I do not know what to say now. I cannot forget how I am wronging you. This is almost more than I can bear."

To divert her mind he began talking about Greenwich Observatory, and the great instruments therein, and how he had been received by the astronomers, and the details of the expedition to observe the transit of Venus, together with many other subjects of the sort, to which she had not power to lend her attention.

"I must reach home before the people are out of church," she at length said, wearily. "I wish nobody to know I have been out this morning." And forbidding Swithin to cross into the open in her company, she left him on the edge of the isolated plantation, which had latterly known her tread so well.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LADY CONSTANTINE crossed the field and the park beyond, and found on passing the church that the congregation was still within. There was no hurry for getting indoors, the open windows enabling her to hear that Mr. Torkingham had only just given out his text. So instead of entering the house, she went through the garden door to the old bowling-green, and sat down in the arbor that Louis had occupied when he overheard the interview between Swithin and the bishop. Not until then did she find courage to draw out the letter and papers relating to the bequest, which Swithin in a critical moment had handed to her.

Had he been ever so little older he would not have placed that unconsidered confidence in her which had led him to give way to her curiosity. But the immense influence over him which seven or eight outnumbering years lent her was again increased by her wider experiences, and he had yielded the point, as he yielded all social points ; while the same juniority freed him from much consciousness that it was his duty to protect her even from herself.

The preamble of Dr. St. Cleve's letter—in which he referred to the young man's promise as an astronomer —disturbed her not at all; indeed, somewhat prepossessed her in favor of the old gentleman who had written it. The first item of what he called "unfavorable news," namely, the allusion to the inadequacy of Swithin's income to the wants of a scientific man, whose lines of work were not calculated to produce pecuniary emoluments for many years, deepened the cast of her face to concern. She reached the second item of the so-called unfavorable news; and her face flushed as she read how the doctor had learned "that there was something in your path worse than narrow means, and that that something was a woman."

"To save you, if possible, from ruin on these heads," she read on, "I take the preventive measures detailed below." And then followed the announcement of the four hundred a year settled on the youth for life, on the single condition that he remained unmarried till the age of twenty-five, just as Swithin had explained to her. She next learned that the bequest was for a definite object: that he might have resources sufficient to enable him to travel in an inexpensive way, and begin a study of the Southern constellations, which, according to the shrewd old man's judgment, were a mine not so thoroughly worked as the Northern, and therefore to be recommended. This was followed by some sentences which hit her in the face like a switch:

"The only other preventive step in my power is that of exhortation. . . . Swithin St. Cleeve, don't make a fool of yourself, as your father did. If your studies

are to be worth anything, believe me, they must be carried on without the help of a woman. Avoid her, and every one of her sex, if you mean to achieve any worthy thing. Eschew all of that sort for many a year yet. Moreover, I say, the lady of your acquaintance avoid in particular. . . . She has, in addition to her original disqualification as a companion for you (that is, that of sex), these two serious drawbacks: she is much older than yourself——"

Lady Constantine's indignant flush forsook her, and pale despair succeeded in its stead. Alas, it was true; handsome and in her prime she might be, but she was too old for Swithin!

"— and she is so impoverished. . . . Beyond this, frankly, I don't think well of her. I don't think well of any woman who dotes upon a younger man than herself. . . . To care to be the first fancy of a young fellow like you shows no great common sense in her. If she were worth her salt she would have too much pride to be intimate with a youth in your unassured position, to say no worse." (Viviette's face, by this time, tingled hot again.) "She is old enough to know that a *liaison* with her may, and almost certainly would, be your ruin; and, on the other hand, that a marriage would be preposterous—unless she is a complete fool, and in that case there is even more reason for avoiding her than if she were in her few senses.

"A woman of honorable feeling, nephew, would be careful to do nothing to hinder you in your career, as this putting of herself in your way most certainly will. Yet I hear that she professes a great anxiety on this same future of yours as a physicist. The best way in which she can show the reality of her anxiety is by lerving you to yourself."

Leaving him to himself! She paled again, as if chilled by a conviction that in this the old man was right.

. . . "She'll blab your most secret plans and theories to every one of her acquaintance, and make them appear ridiculous by announcing them before they are

matured. If you attempt to study with a woman, you'll be ruled by her to entertain fancies instead of theories, air-castles instead of intentions, qualms instead of opinions, sickly prepossessions instead of reasoned conclusions. . . .

"A woman waking your passions just at a moment when you are endeavvoring to shine intellectually is like stirring up the mud at the bottom of a clear brook. All your brightness and sparkle are taken away; you become moping and thick-headed; obstructions that before only brought out your brilliancies now disfigure your each dull attempt to surmount them."

Thus much the letter; and it was enough for her, indeed. The flushes of indignation which had passed over her from time to time, as she gathered this man's opinion of herself, combined with flushes of grief and shame when she considered that Swithin, her dear Swithin, was perfectly acquainted with this cynical view of her nature; that, reject it as he might, and as he unquestionably did, such thoughts of her had been implanted in him, and lay in him; stifled as they were, they lay in him like seeds too deep for germination, which accident might some day bring near the surface and aerate into life. The humility of such a possibility was almost too much to endure; the mortification—she had known nothing like it till now. But this was not all. Those tingling emotions were succeeded by feelings in comparison with which resentment and mortification were happy moods—a miserable conviction that this old man, who spoke from the grave, was not altogether wrong in his speaking; that he was only half wrong; that he was, perhaps, virtually right. Only those persons whom nature has unhappily endowed with that appreciativeness of others' positions which empowers them to observe themselves from the outside can understand the smart of such convictions against self—the wish for annihilation that is engendered in the moment of despair at feeling that at length we, our own last, firmest friend, cease to believe in our own cause.

Viviette could hear the people coming out of church on the other side of the garden wall; their footsteps and their cheerful voices died away. The bell rang for lunch, and she went in. But her life during that morning and afternoon was wholly introspective. Knowing the whole circumstances of his situation as she knew them now, as she had never before known them, ought she to make herself the legal wife of Swithin St. Cleeve, and so secure her own honor, at any price to him? Such was the formidable question which Lady Constantine propounded to her startled understanding. As a suggestively honest woman alone, beginning her charity at home, there was no doubt that she ought. Save thyself was sound Old Testament doctrine, and not altogether discounted in the New. But was there a line of conduct which transcended mere self-preservation, and would it not be an excellent thing to put into practice now.

That she had wronged St. Cleeve by marrying him, that she would wrong him infinitely more by completing the marriage, there was—in her opinion—no doubt. She in her experience had sought out him in his inexperience, and had led him like a child. She remembered, as if it had been her fault, though it was in fact only her misfortune, that she had been the one to go for the license, and take up her residence in the parish in which they were wedded. He was now just one and twenty. Without her, he had all the world before him, four hundred a year, and leave to cut as straight a road to fame as he should choose. With her, this story was negatived. Beyond leading him to waste the active spring-time of his life in idle adoration of her as his sweetheart, and depriving him of his inestimable independency by allowing him to make her his wife, she had indirectly been the means of ruining him in the good opinion of Bishop Helmsdale—a man who was once his father's acquaintance, and who had been strongly disposed to become the younger man's friend. Encouragement and aid from the bishop would have been of no mean value to a youth without backers of any kind.

On the other hand, what had he gained by his alliance with her? Well, an equatorial telescope,—that was about all: while to set against this there was the disinclination to adventure further which her constant presence had imparted; the yoke with a woman whose disparity of years, though immaterial just now, would operate in the future as a wet blanket upon his social ambitions; that content with life as it was which she had noticed more than once in him latterly, and which was imperiling his scientific spirit by abstracting his zest for progress.

It was impossible, in short, to blind herself to the inference that marriage with her had not benefited him, as a man who—in her fond belief—had a great work to do, to the extent they both had expected. Matters might improve in the future; but to take upon herself the whole liability of Swithin's life, as she would do by causing him to sacrifice the help his uncle had offered, was a fearful responsibility. How could she, an unendowed woman, replace such assistance? His recent visit to Greenwich, which had momentarily revived the zest for his pursuits that was now less constant than heretofore, should by rights be supplemented by other such expeditions. It would be true benevolence not to deprive him of means to continue them, and so to keep his ardor alive, regardless of the cost to herself.

It could be done. By the extraordinary favor of a unique accident, she had now an opportunity of redeeming Swithin's seriously compromised future, and restoring him to a state no worse than his first. His annuity could be enjoyed by him, his travels undertaken, his studies pursued, his high vocation initiated, by one little sacrifice,—that of herself. She only had to refuse to realize their marriage by repeating it, to part from him forever, and all would be well with him thenceforward. The pain to him would after all be but slight, whatever it might be to his wretched Viviette.

Such passion as he had shown for her, boyish, and never, perhaps, very strong, had, in the inevitable

course of marriage on such terms, been softened down to mild affection. She had seen only too clearly this morning that, owing to his Greenwich visit, she had again sunk to a second place in his heart, if she had ever occupied a higher: his darling science re-asserting its right to the first. It was the ordinary fate of scientific men's wives; she should have thought of it before. Was there not, then, something reactionary and selfish in her persisting to clinch a union for the assurance of her individual composure, now that her conception of that course as an advantage to him had been proved wildly erroneous?

The horror of retaining him at her side lay not only in the fact, itself of injury to him, but in the likelihood of his living to see it as such, and reproaching her for selfishness for not letting him go, in this unprecedented opportunity for correcting a move proved to be false. He wished to examine the southern heavens,—perhaps his uncle's letter was the father of the wish,—and there was no telling what good might not result to mankind at large from his exploits there. Why should she, to save her narrow honor, waste the wide promise of his ability? True, an objector might have urged, on her side, that her dear Swithin's wondrous works among the children of men existed as yet only in her imagination; while the present quandary was an unquestionable fact. But Lady Constantine would have been the first to deprecate the ungenerousness of such a skeptical reasoner.

That in immolating herself by refusing him, and leaving him free to work wonders for the good of his fellow-creatures, she would in all probability add to the sum of human felicity consoled her by its breath as an idea, even while it tortured her by making herself the scape-goat or single unit on which the evil would fall. Ought a possibly large number, Swithin included, to remain unbenefited because the one individual to whom his release would be an injury chanced to be herself? Love between man and woman, which in Homer, Moses, and other early exhibitors of life is mere desire, had for centuries past so far broadened

as to include sympathy and friendship; surely, it should, in this advanced stage of the world, include benevolence also. If so, it was her duty to set her young man free.

Thus she labored, with a generosity more worthy even than its object, to sink her love for her own decorum in devotion to the world in general and Swithin in particular. To council her activities by her understanding, rather than by her emotions, as usual, was hard work for a tender woman; but she strove hard, and made advance. The self-centered attitude natural to one in her situation was becoming displaced by the sympathetic attitude, which, though it had to be artificially fostered at first, gave her, by degrees, a certain sweet sense that she was rising above self-love. That maternal element which had from time to time evinced itself in her affection for the youth, and was imparted by her superior ripeness in experience and years, appeared now again as she drew nearer the resolve not to secure propriety in her own social condition at the expense of this youth's earthly utility.

Unexpectedly grand fruits are sometimes born of mean roots. The illiberal letter of Swithin's uncle was suggesting to Lady Constantine a more comprehensive morality than the highest efforts of direct instructors had ever been able to instil. To love him so far better than herself as this was to surpass the love of women as conventionally understood, and as mostly existing.

Before, however, clinching her decision by any definite step, she worried her little brain by devising every kind of ingenious scheme, in the hope of lighting on one that might show her how that decision could be avoided, with the same good result. But to secure for him the advantages offered, and to retain him likewise,—reflection only showed it to be impossible! Yet to let him go forever was more than she could endure, and at length she jumped at an idea which promised some sort of improvement on that design. She would propose that reunion should not be entirely abandoned, but simply postponed,—namely, till after

his twenty-fifth birth-day, when he might be her husband without, at any rate, the loss to him of the income. By this time he would approximate to a man's full judgment, and that painful aspect of her as one who deluded his raw immaturity would have passed forever.

The plan somewhat appeased her disquieted honor. To let a marriage sink into abeyance for four or five years was not to nullify it; and though she would leave it to him to move its substantiation at the end of that time, without present stipulations, she had not much doubt upon the issue.

The clock struck five. This silent mental debate had occupied her whole afternoon. Perhaps it would not have ended now, but for an unexpected incident, —the entry of her brother Louis. He came into the room where she was sitting, or rather writing; and after a few words to explain how he had got there, and about the mistake in the date of Sir Blount's death, he walked up close to her. His next remarks were apologetic in form, but in essence they were bitterness itself.

"Viviette," he said, "I am sorry for my hasty words to you when I last left this house. I readily withdraw them. My suspicions took a wrong direction. I think now that I know the truth! You have been even madder than I supposed!"

"In what way?" she asked, distantly.

"I had lately thought that unhappy young man was only your too-favored lover."

"You thought wrong; he is not."

"He is not—I believe you—for he is more. I now am persuaded that he is your lawful husband. Can you deny it?"

"I can."

"On your sacred word?"

"On my sacred word, he is not that, either."

"Thank Heaven for that assurance!" said Louis, exhaling a breath of relief. "I was not so positive as I pretended to be, but I wanted to know the truth of

this mystery. Since you are not fettered to him in that way, I care nothing."

Louis turned away, and that afforded her an opportunity for leaving the room. These few words were the last grains that had turned the balance, and settled her doom. She would let Swithin go. All the voices in her world had seemed to clamor for that consummation. The morning's mortification, the afternoon's benevolence, and the evening's instincts of evasion had combined to carry the point.

Accordingly, she sat down and wrote to Swithin a summary of the thoughts above detailed. "We shall separate," she concluded; "you to obey your uncle's orders and explore the southern skies; I to wait as one who can implicitly trust you. Do not see me again till the years have expired. You will find me still the same. I am your wife through all time. The letter of the law is not needed to reassert it at present, while the absence of the letter secures your fortune."

Nothing can express what it cost Lady Constantine to marshal her arguments; but she did it, and vanquished self-comfort by a sense of the general expediency. It may unhesitatingly be affirmed that the only ignoble reason which might have dictated such a step was non-existent; that is to say, a serious decline in her affection. Tenderly she had loved the youth at first, and tenderly she loved him now, as time and her conduct after proved.

Women the most delicate get used to strange moral situations. Eve probably regained her normal sweet composure about a week after the Fall. On first learning of her anomalous position, Lady Constantine's cheek had blushed hot, and her instincts prompted her to legalize her marriage without a moment's delay Heaven and earth were to be moved at once to effect it. Day after day had passed; her union had remained unsecured, and the idea of its nullity had gradually ceased to be strange to her, till it became of little account beside her generous resolve for the young man's sake.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE immediate effect upon St. Cleeve of the receipt of her well-reasoned argument for retrocession was, naturally, a bitter attack upon himself for having been guilty of such cruel carelessness as to leave in her way the lawyer's letter that had first made her aware of his uncle's provision for him. Immature as he was, he could realize Viviette's position sufficiently well to perceive what the poor lady must suffer at having suddenly thrust upon her the responsibility of repairing her own situation as a wife by ruining his as a legatee. True, it was by the purest inadvertance that his pending sacrifice of means had been discovered; but he should have taken special pains to render such a *contretemps* impossible. If, on the first occasion when a revelation might have been made with impunity, he would not put it in the power of her good nature to relieve his position by refusing him, he should have shown double care not to do so now, when she could not exercise that benevolence without the loss of honor. With a young man's inattention to issues, he had not considered how sharp her feelings as a woman must be in this contingency. It had seemed the easiest thing in the world to remedy the defect in their marriage, and that therefore there was nothing to be anxious about. And in his innocence of any thought of securing the bequest, by taking advantage of the loop-hole in his matrimonial bond, he undervalued the importance of concealing the existence of that bequest.

The looming fear of unhappiness between them revived in Swithin the warmest emotions of their earlier acquaintance. Almost before the sun had he hastened to Welland House in search of her. The air was dis-

curbed by a stiff summer wind, productive of windfalls and premature descents of leafage. It was an hour when unripe apples shower down in orchards, and unbrowned chestnuts descend in their husks upon the park glades. There was no help for it this afternoon but to call upon her in a direct manner, regardless of suspicion. He was thunderstruck when, while waiting in the full expectation of being admitted to her presence, the answer was brought back to him that she was engaged.

This had never happened before in the whole course of their acquaintance. But he knew what it meant, and turned away with a vague disquietude. He did not know that Lady Constantine was just above his head, listening to his movements with the liveliest emotions, and, while praying for him to go, longing for him to insist on seeing her and spoil all. But the faintest symptom being always sufficient to convince him of having blundered, he unwittingly took her at her word, and went rapidly away.

However, he called again the next day; and she, having gained strength by one victory over herself, was enabled to repeat her refusal with greater ease. Knowing this to be the only course by which her point could be maintained, she clung to it with strenuous and religious pertinacity.

Thus immured and self-controlling she passed a week. Her brother, though he did not live in the house (preferring the nearest watering place at this time of the year), was continually coming there; and one day he happened to be present when she refused Swithin for the third time. Louis, who did not observe the tears in her eyes, was astonished and delighted; she was coming to her senses at last. Believing now that there had been nothing more between them than a too plainly shown partiality on her part, he expressed his commendation of her conduct to her face. At this, instead of owning to its advantage, also, her tears burst forth outright.

Not knowing what to make of this, Louis said: "Well, I am simply upholding you in your course."

"Yes—yes—I know it!" she cried. "And it is my deliberately chosen course. I wish he—Swithin St. Cleeve—would go on his travels—at once, and leave the place. Four hundred a year has been left to him for travel and study of the Southern constellations; and I wish he would use it. You might represent the advantage to him of the course, if you cared to."

Louis thought he could do no better than let Swithin know this as soon as possible. Accordingly, when St. Cleeve was writing in the hut, the next day, he heard the crackle of footsteps over the fir spikelets outside, and jumped up, supposing them to be hers; but to his disappointment it was her brother who appeared at the door.

"Excuse my invading the hermitage, St. Cleeve," he said, in his careless way. "But I have heard from my sister of your good fortune."

"My good fortune?"

"Yes, in having an opportunity for roving; and with a traveler's conceit I couldn't help coming to give you the benefit of my experience. When do you start?"

"I have not—formed any plan as yet. Indeed, I had not quite been thinking of going——"

Louis stared. "Not going? Then I have been misinformed. What I have heard is that a good uncle has kindly bequeathed you a sufficient income to make a second Isaac Newton of you, if you only use it as he directs."

Swithin breathed quickly, but said nothing.

"If you have not decided so to make use of it, let me implore you, as your friend, and one nearly old enough to be your father, to decide at once. Such a chance does not happen to a scientific youth once in a century."

"Thank you for your good advice—for it is good in itself, I know," said Swithin, in a low voice. "But—has Lady Constantine spoken of it at all?"

"She thinks as I do."

"She has spoken to you on the subject?"

"Certainly. More than that, it is at her request—

though I did not intend to say so—that I come to speak to you about it now."

"Frankly and plainly," said Swithin, his voice trembling with a compound of scientific and amatory emotion that defies definition, "does she say seriously that she wishes me to go?"

"She does."

"Then go I will," said Swithin, firmly. "I have been fortunate enough to interest some leading astronomers, including the Astronomer-Royal; and in a letter received this morning I learn that the use of the Cape observatory has been offered me for any southern observations I may wish to make. This offer I will accept. Will you kindly let Lady Constantine know this, since she is interested in my welfare?"

Louis promised, and when he was gone Swithin looked blankly at his own situation, as if he could scarcely believe in its reality. Her letter to him, then, had been deliberately written; she meant him to go. But he was determined that none of those misunderstandings which ruin the happiness of lovers should be allowed to creep in in the present case. He would see her, if he slept under her walls all night to do it, and would hear the order to depart from her own lips. This unexpected stand she was making for his interests was winning his admiration to such a degree as to be in danger of defeating the very cause it was meant to subserve. A woman like this was not to be forsaken in a hurry. He wrote two lines, and left the note at the house with his own hand:

THE CABIN, RING'S HILL.

DEAREST VIVIETTE—If you insist, I will go. But letter-writing will not do. I must have the command from your own two lips; otherwise I shall not stir. I am here every evening at seven. Can you come?

S.

This note, as fate would have it, reached her hands in the single hour of that week when she was in a mood to comply with his request—whilst moved by

the reflex emotion that had followed Louis' praise of her for dismissing Swithin. She went up-stairs to the window that had so long served purposes of this kind, and signalled "yes."

St. Cleeve soon saw the answer she had given, and watched her approach from the tower as the sun drew on. The vivid circumstances of his life at this date led him ever to remember the external scenes in which they were set. It was now early autumn—the time of phenomenal irradiations. To-night the west heaven gleamed like a foundry of all metals, common and rare; the clouds were broken into a thousand fragments, and the margin of every fragment shone. Foreseeing the disadvantage and pain to her of maintaining a resolve under the pressure of a meeting, he vowed not to urge her by word or sign; to put the question plainly and calmly, and to discuss it with her on a reasonable basis only, like the philosophers they assumed themselves to be.

But this intention was scarcely adhered to in all its integrity. She duly appeared on the margin of the field, flooded with the metallic radiance that marked the close of this day; whereupon he quickly descended the steps, and met her at the cabin door. As the evening grew darker and darker, he listened to her reasoning, which was precisely a repetition of that already sent him by letter, and by degrees accepted her decision, since she would not revoke it. Time came for them to say good-by, and then

> "He turned, and saw the terror in her eyes,
> That yearned upon him, shining in such wise
> As a star midway in the midnight fixed."

It was the misery of her own condition that showed forth, hitherto obscured by her ardor for ameliorating his. They closed together and kissed each other, as though the emotion of their whole year and half's acquaintance had settled down upon that moment.

"I won't go away from you," said Swithin, huskily "Why did you propose it for an instant?"

Thus the nearly ended interview was again prolonged. Time, however, was merciless, and the hour came when she was compelled to depart. Swithin walked with her toward the house, as he had walked many times before, believing that all was now smooth again between them, and caring, it must be owned, very little for his fame as an expositor of the southern constellations just then.

When they reached the silent house, he said what he had not ventured to say before: "Fix the day. You have decided that it is to be soon, and that I am not to go!"

But youthful Swithin was far, very far, from being up to the fond subtlety of Viviette this evening. "I cannot—decide here," she said, gently, releasing herself from his arms. "I will speak to you from the window. Wait for me."

She vanished; and he waited. It was a long time before the window opened, and he was not aware that, with her customary complication of feeling, she had knelt for some time inside the room before looking out.

"Well?" said he.

"It cannot be," she answered. "I cannot ruin you. But the day after you are five-and-twenty our marriage shall be confirmed, if you choose."

"Oh, my Viviette, how is this?" he cried.

"Swithin, I have not altered. But I feared for my powers, and could not tell you whilst I stood by your side. You are too young—to be fettered. I should have thought of it! Do not communicate with me for at least a year; it is imperative. . . . Do not tell me your plans. If we part, we do part. I have vowed a vow not to further obstruct the course you have decided on before you knew me and my puling ways; and by Heaven's help I'll keep that vow. . . . Now go. These are the parting words of your own Viviette!"

Swithin, who was stable as a giant in all that appertained to nature and life outside humanity, was childishly flexible in social matters. He was quite awed by her firmness, and looked vacantly at her for a time,

till she closed the window. Then he mechanically turned, and went as she had commanded.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A week had passed away. It had been a time of cloudy mental weather to Swithin and Viviette, but the only noteworthy fact about it was that what had been planned to happen therein had actually taken place. Swithin had gone from Welland, and would shortly go from England. Lady Constantine became aware of it by a note which he posted to her on his way through Warborne. There was much evidence of haste in the note, and something of reserve. The latter she could not understand, but it might have been obvious enough if she had considered.

On the morning of his departure he had sat on the edge of his bed : the sunlight streaming through the early mist ; the house-martins scratching the back of the ceiling over his head, as they scrambled out from the roof for their day's gnat-hunting ; the thrushes cracking snails on the garden stones outside with the noisiness of little smiths at work on little anvils. The sun in sending its rods of yellow fire into his room sent, as he suddenly thought, mental illumination with it. For the first time, as he sat there, it had crossed his mind that Viviette might have reasons for this separation which he knew not of. There might be family reasons,—mysterious blood necessities, which are said to rule members of all musty-mansioned families, and are unknown to other members of society; and they may have been just now brought before her by her brother Louis, on the condition that they were religiously concealed.

The idea of some family skeleton, like those he had read of in memoirs, having been unearthed by Louis, and held before her terrified understanding as a matter which rendered Swithin's departure and the neu-

tralization of the marriage no less indispensable to them than it was an advantage to himself, seemed a very plausible one to Swithin just now. Viviette might naturally have taken Louis into her confidence at last, for the sake of his brotherly advice. Swithin knew that of her own heart she would never wish to get rid of him ; but coerced by Louis, might she not have grown to entertain views of its expediency ? Events made such a supposition on St. Cleeve's part as natural as it was inaccurate, and, conjoined with his own excitement at the thought of seeing a new heaven overhead, influenced him to write but the briefest and most hurried final note to her, in which he fully obeyed her sensitive request that he would omit all reference to his plans. These, at the last moment, had been modified to fall in with the winter expedition formerly mentioned, to observe the transit of Venus at a remote southern station.

The business being done, and himself plunged into the preliminaries of an important scientific pilgrimage, Swithin acquired that lightness of heart which most men feel in forsaking old love for new adventure, no matter how charming may be the girl they leave behind them. Moreover, in the present case, the man was endowed with that school-boy temperament which does not see, or at least consider with much curiosity, the effect of a given scheme upon others than himself. The bearing upon Lady Constantine of what was an undoubted predicament for any woman was forgotten in his feeling that she had done a very handsome and noble thing for him, and that he was therefore bound in honor to make the most of it.

His going had resulted in anything but lightness of heart for her. Her sad fancy could, indeed, indulge in dreams of her yellow-haired laddie without that formerly besetting fear that those dreams would prompt her to actions likely to distract and hinder him. She was wretched on her own account, relieved on his. She no longer stood in the way of his advancement, and that was enough. For herself, she could live in retirement ; visit the wood, the old camp,

and the column, and, like Œnone, think of the life they had led there,—

> "Mournful Œnone, wandering forlorn
> Of Paris, once her playmate on the hills;"

leaving it entirely to his goodness whether he would come and claim her in the future, or desert her forever.

She was diverted for a time from these sad performances by a letter which reached her from Bishop Helmsdale. To see his handwriting again on an envelope, after thinking so anxiously of making a father confessor of him, startled her out of her equanimity. She speedily regained it, however, when she read his note.

THE PALACE, MELCHESTER,
August 15, 18——

MY DEAR LADY CONSTANTINE,—I am shocked and grieved that, in the strange dispensation of things here below, my offer of marriage should have reached you almost simultaneously with the intelligence that your widowhood had been of several months' less duration than you and I and the world had supposed. I can quite understand that, viewed from any side, the news must have shaken and disturbed you ; and your unequivocal refusal to entertain any idea of a new alliance at such a moment was, of course, intelligible, natural, and praiseworthy. At present I will say no more beyond expressing a hope that you will accept my assurances that I was quite ignorant of the news at the time of writing, and a sincere desire that, in due time, and as soon as you have recovered your equanimity, I may be allowed to renew my proposal.

I am, my dear Lady Constantine,
Yours ever sincerely,
C. MELCHESTER.

She laid the letter aside, and thought no more about it, beyond a momentary meditation on the errors into which people fall in reasoning from actions to motives.

Louis, who was now again with her, became, in due course, acquainted with the contents of the letter, and was satisfied with the promising position in which matters stood all round.

Lady Constantine went her mournful ways as she had planned to do, her chief resort being the familiar column, where she experienced the unutterable melancholy of seeing two carpenters dismantle the dome of its felt covering, detach its ribs, and clear away the enclosure at the top, till everything stood as it had before Swithin had been known to the place. The equatorial had already been packed in a box, to be in readiness if he should send for it from abroad. The cabin too, was in course of demolition, such having been his directions, acquiesced in by her, before he started. Yet she could not bear the idea that these structures, so germane to the events of their romance, should be removed as if removed forever. Going to the men, she bade them to store up the materials intact, that they might be re-erected if desired. She had the junctions of the timbers marked with figures, the boards numbered, and the different sets of screws tied up in independent papers for indentification. She did not hear the remarks of the workmen when she had gone, to the effect that the young man would as soon think of buying a halter for himself as come back and spy at the moon from Rings-Hill Speer, after seeing the glories of other nations, and the gold and jewels that were found there, or she might have been more unhappy than she was.

On returning from one of these walks to the column, a curious circumstance occurred. It was evening, and she was coming as usual down through the sighing plantation, wending her way between the ramparts of the camp towards the outlet giving upon the field, when suddenly, in a dusky vista among the trunks, she saw, or thought she saw, a golden-haired toddling child. The child moved a step or two, and vanished behind a tree. Lady Constantine, fearing it had lost its way, went quickly to the spot, searched, and called aloud. But no child could she perceive or hear any-

where around. She returned to where she had stood when first beholding it, and looked in the same direction ; but nothing reappeared. The only object at all resembling a little boy or girl was the upper tuft of a bunch of fern, which had prematurately yellowed to about the color of a fair child's hair, and waved occasionally in the breeze. This, however, did not sufficiently explain the phenomenon, and she returned to inquire of the man whom she had left at work removing the last traces of Swithin's cabin. But he had left with her departure and the approach of night. Feeling an indescribable dread, she retraced her steps and hastened home, doubting if she had been mistaken, yet half believing that her imagination must have played her some trick that day.

The tranquil mournfulness of these few days of solitude was terminated in a most unexpected manner. The morning after the above-mentioned incident, Lady Constantine, after meditating a while, arose with a conviction. She realized a condition of things that she had never anticipated, and for a moment the discovery so overwhelmed her that she thought she must die outright. In her terror she said she had sown the wind to reap the whirlwind. Then the instinct of self-preservation flamed up in her like a fire. Her altruism in subjecting her self-love to benevolence, and letting Swithin go away from her, was demolished by the new necessity, as if it had been a gossamer web.

There was no resisting or evading the spontaneous plan of action which matured itself in her mind in five minutes. Where was Swithin ? How could he be got at instantly ? That was her single thought. She searched about the room for his last short note, hoping, yet doubting, that its contents were more explicit on his intended movements than the few meagre syllables which alone she could call to mind. She could not find the letter in her room, and came down-stairs to Louis as pale as a ghost.

He looked up at her, and with some concern said : " What's the matter ? "

"I am searching everywhere for a letter,—a note from Mr. St. Cleeve; just a few words, telling me when the Occidental sails, that he goes in!"

"Why do you want that unimportant document?"

"It is of the utmost importance that I should know whether he has sailed or not!" said the poor lady, in agonized tones. "Where can that letter be?"

Louis knew where that letter was, for, having seen it on her desk, he had, without reading it, torn it up and thrown it into the waste-paper basket; thinking that the less that remained to remind her of that young philosopher the better. "I destroyed it," he said.

"Oh, Louis, why did you?" she cried, in despair. "I am going to follow him,—I think it best to do so,—and I want to know if he is gone, and now the date is lost!"

"Going to run after St. Cleeve!"

"Yes, I am!" she said, with vehemence. "I must see him. I want to speak to him as soon as possible."

"Good God, Viviette, are you mad?"

"Oh, what was the date of that ship? But it cannot be helped. I start at once for Southampton. I have made up my mind to do it. He was going to his uncle's solicitors in the north first; then he was coming back to Southampton. He cannot have sailed yet."

"I believe he has sailed," muttered Louis, sullenly.

She did not wait to argue with him, but returned up-stairs, where she rang to tell Green to be ready with the pony to drive her to Warborne station in a quarter of an hour.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VIVIETTE'S determination to hamper Swithin no longer had led her, as has been shown, to thwart any weak impulse of hers to write and entreat his return, by forbidding him to furnish her with his foreign address. His obedient disposition, his fear that there might be other reasons behind, made him obey her command only too literally. Thus, to her terror and dismay, she had placed a gratuitous difficulty in the way of her present endeavor

She was ready before Green, and urged on that factotum so wildly as to leave him no time to change the corduroys and skitty-boots in which he had been gardening. He therefore turned himself into a coachman as far down as his waist, merely putting on his proper coat, hat, and waistcoat, and wrapping a rug over his agricultural half below. In this compromise he appeared at the door, mounted, and reins in hand.

Seeing how sad and determined Viviette was, Louis pitied her so far as to put nothing in the way of her starting, though he forebore to help her. He thought her conduct sentimental foolery, the outcome of mistaken pity, and "such a kind of gain-giving as would trouble a woman;" and he decided that it would be better to let this mood burn itself out than to keep it smouldering by obstruction.

"Do you remember the date of his sailing?" she said, finally, as the pony carriage turned to drive off.

"He sails on the 25th; that is to-day. But it may not be till late in the evening."

With this she started, and reached Warborne in time for the up-train. How much longer than it really is a long journey can seem to be was fully learned by the

unhappy Viviette that day. The changeful procession of country seats past which she was dragged, the names and memories of their owners, had no points of interest for her now. She reached Southampton about midday, and drove straight to the docks.

On approaching the gates, she was met by a crowd of people and vehicles coming out—men, women, children, porters, police, cabs, and carts. The Occidental had just sailed.

The adverse intelligence came upon her with such odds, after her morning's tension, that she could scarcely crawl back to the cab which had brought her. But this was not a time to succumb. As she had no luggage she dismissed the man, and, without any real consciousness of what she was doing, strolled away, and sat down on a pile of merchandise.

After long thinking her case assumed a more hopeful complexion. Much might probably be done toward communicating with him in the time at her command. The obvious step to this end, which she should have thought of sooner, would be to go to his grandmother, in Welland Bottom, and there obtain his itinerary in detail—no doubt well known to Mrs. Martin. There was no leisure for her to consider longer, if she would be home again that night; and, returning to the railway, she waited on a seat, without eating or drinking, till a train was ready to take her back.

By the time she again stood in Warborne the sun rested his chin upon the meadows, and enveloped the distant outline of the Ring's-Hill column in his humid rays.

Hiring an empty fly that chanced to be at the station, she was driven through the little town onward to Welland, which she approached about eight o'clock. At her request, the man set her down at the entrance to the park; and when he was out of sight, instead of pursuing her way to the house, she went along the highroad in the direction of Mrs. Martin's.

Dusk was drawing on, and the bats were wheeling over the green basin called Welland Bottom, by the time she arrived; and had any other errand instigated

her call she would have postponed it till the morrow. Nobody responded to her knock, but she could hear footsteps going hither and thither up-stairs, and dull noises as of articles moved from their places. She knocked again and again, and ultimately the door was opened by Hannah, as usual.

"I could make nobody hear," said Lady Constantine, who was so weary she could scarcely stand.

"I am very, very sorry, my lady," said Hannah, slightly awed on beholding her visitor. "But we was a-putting poor Mr. Swithin's rooms to rights, now that he is, as a woman may say, dead and buried to us; so we didn't hear your ladyship. I'll call Mrs. Martin at once. She is up in the room that used to be his work-room."

Here Hannah's voice implied moist eyes, and Lady Constantine's immediately overflowed.

"No; I'll go up to her," said Viviette; and almost in advance of Hannah she passed up the shrunken ash stairs.

The ebbing light was not enough to reveal to Mrs. Martin's aged gaze the personality of her visitor till Hannah explained. "I'll get a light, my lady," she said.

"No, I would rather not. What are you doing, Mrs. Martin?"

"Well, the poor misguided boy is gone, and he's gone for good to me. I am a woman of over four-score years, my Lady Constantine; my junketing days are over, and whether 'tis feasting or whether 'tis sorrowing in the land will soon be nothing to me. But his life may be long and active, and for the sake of him I care for what I shall never see, and wish to make pleasant what I shall never enjoy. I am setting his room in order, as the place will be his own freehold when I am gone; so that when he comes back he may find all his poor jim-cracks and trangleys as he left 'em, and not feel that I have betrayed his trust."

Old Mrs. Martin's voice revealed that she had burst into such few tears as were left her, and then Hannah

began crying, likewise; whereupon Lady Constantine, whose heart had been bursting all day (and who, indeed, considering her looming trouble, had reason enough for tears), broke into bitterer sobs than either—sobs of asolute pain that could no longer be concealed.

Hannah was the first to discover that Lady Constantine was weeping with them, and her feelings being probably the least intense among the three, she instantly controlled herself.

"Refrain yourself, my dear woman," she said, hastily, to Mrs. Martin. "Don't you see how it disturbs my lady?" And turning to Viviette she whispered: "Her years be so great, your ladyship, that perhaps ye'll excuse her for bursting out afore ye? We know when the mind is dim, my lady, there's not the manners there should be; but decayed people can't help it, poor old soul!"

"Hannah, that will do now. Perhaps Lady Constantine would like to speak to me alone," said Mrs. Martin. And when Hannah had retreated Mrs. Martin continued: "Such a charge as she is, my lady, on account of her great age! You'll pardon her biding here as if she were one of the family. I put up with such things because of her long service, and we know that years lead to childishness."

"What are you doing? Can I help you?" Viviette asked, as Mrs. Martin, after speaking, turned to lift some large article.

"Oh, 'tis only the rames of a telescope that's got no works in his inside," said Swithin's grandmother, seizing the huge pasteboard tube that Swithin had made and abandoned, because he could get no lenses to suit it. "I am going to hang it up to these hooks, and there it will bide till he comes again."

Lady Constantine took one end, and the tube was hung up against the whitewashed wall by strings that the old woman had tied around it. "Here's all his equinoctial lines, and his topics of Capricorn, and I don't know what besides," Mrs. Martin continued, pointing to some charcoal scratches upon the wall.

"I shall never rub 'em out; no, though 'tis such untidiness as I was never brought up to, I shall never rub 'em out."

"Where has Swithin gone to first?" asked Viviette anxiously. "Where does he say you are to write to him?"

"Nowhere yet, my lady. He's going traipsing all over Europe and America, and then to the South Pacific Ocean about this Transit of Venus that's going to be done there. He is to write to us first,—God knows when!—for he said that if we didn't hear from him for six months we were not to be gallied at all."

At this intelligence, so much worse than she had expected, Lady Constantine stood mute, sank down, and would have fallen to the floor if there had not been a chair behind her. Controlling herself by a strenuous effort, she disguised her despair, and asked vacantly: "From America to the South Pacific—transit of Venus?" (Swithin's arrangement to accompany the expedition had been made at the last moment, and therefore she had not as yet been informed.)

"Yes,—to a lone island, I believe."

"Yes,—a lone islant, my lady," echoed Hannah, who had crept in and made herself one of the family again, in spite of Mrs. Martin.

"He is going to meet the English and American astronomers there at the end of the year. After that he will most likely go on to the Cape."

"But before the end of the year, what places did he tell you of visiting?"

"Let me collect myself. He is going to the observatory of Cambridge, United States, to meet some gentlemen there, and spy through the great refractor. Then there's the observatory of Chicago, and I think he has a letter to make him beknown to a gentleman in the observatory at Marseilles; and he wants to go to Vienna; and Poulkowa, too, he means to take in his way,—there being learned instruments and a staff of astronomers at each place."

"Does he take Europe or America first?" she asked faintly, for the account seemed hopeless.

Mrs. Martin could not tell till she had heard from Swithin. It depended upon what he had been advised to do by his great-uncle's solicitor.

Lady Constantine bade the old people good-bye, and dragged her weary limbs homeward. The fatuousness of forethought had seldom been evinced more ironically. Had she done nothing to hinder him, he would have kept up an unreserved communication with her, and all might have been well.

For that night she could undertake nothing further, and she waited for the next day. Then at once she wrote two letters to Swithin, directing one to the Marseilles observatory, one to the observatory at Cambridge, Massachusets, as being the only two spots on the face of the globe at which they were likely to intercept him. Each letter stated to him the urgent reasons which existed for his return, and contained a passionately regretful intimation that the annuity, on which his hopes depended, must of necessity be sacrificed by the completion of their original contract, without delay.

But letter conveyance was too slow a process to satisfy her. To send an epitome of her epistles by telegraph was, after all, indispensable. Such an imploring sentence as she desired to address to him it would be hazardous to dispatch from Warborne; and she took a dreary journey to Southampton, on purpose to send it from an office at which she was unknown.

Here she handed in her messages in duplicate, addressing them as she had addressed the letters, and again returned home.

With regard to Marseilles, she assumed that an answer might be expected in a day, if he had gone there. She waited two days, three days; and there being no return telegram from Marseilles, the inference was that he had gone to America. For an answer to her American telegram she ought to wait a week or ten days longer, to allow him to get to Cambridge and receive it.

Then she considered the weakness, the stultifying nature, of her attempt at recall.

Events mocked her on all sides. By the favor of an accident, and by her own immense exertions against her instincts, Swithin had been restored to the rightful heritage that he had nearly forfeited on her account. He had just started off to utilize it; when she, without a moment's warning, was asking him again to cast it away. She had set a certain machinery in motion, to stop it before it had revolved once.

A horrid apprehension possessed her. It had been easy for Swithin to give up what he had never known the advantage of keeping; but having once begun to enjoy his possession, would he give it up now? Could he be depended on for such self-sacrifice? Suppose there arrived no reply from him for the next three months, and that, when his answer came, he were to inform her that, having now fully acquiesced in her original decision, he found the life he was leading so profitable as to be unable fo abandon it, even to please her; that he was very sorry, but having embarked on this course by her advice, he meant to adhere to it by his own.

There was, indeed, every probability that, moving about as he was doing, and cautioned as he had been by her very self against listening to her too readily, she would receive no reply of any sort from him for three, or perhaps, four months. This would be on the eve of the transit, and what likelihood was there that a young man, full of ardor for that spectacle, would forego it at the last moment to a humdrum domesticity with a woman eight years his senior?

If she could only leave him to his career, and save her own situation also! But at that moment the proposition seemed as impossible as to construct a triangle of two straight lines.

In her walk home, pervaded by these hopeless views, she passed near the dark and deserted tower. Night in that solitary place, which would have caused her some uneasiness in her years of blitheness, had no terrors for her now. She went up the winding path,

and, the door being unlocked, felt her way to the top. The open sky greeted her as in times previous to the dome and equatorial period ; but there was not a star to suggest to her in which direction Swithin had gone. The absence of the dome suggested a way out of her difficulties. A leap in the dark, and all would be over. But she had not reached that stage of action as yet, and the thought was dismissed as quickly as it had come.

The new consideration which at present occupied her mind was whether she could have the courage to leave Swithin to himself, as in the original plan, and singly meet her impending trial, despising the shame, till he should return, at five-and-twenty, and claim her. Yet was this assumption of his return so very safe? How altered things would be at that time! At twenty-five he would still be young and handsome ; she would be three-and-thirty, faded, middle-aged, and homely. A fear sharp as a frost settled down upon her that in any such scheme as this she would be building upon the sand.

She hardly knew how she reached home that night! Entering by the lawn door, she saw a red coal in the direction of the arbor. Louis was smoking there and he came forward.

He had not seen her since the morning, and was naturally anxious about her. She blessed the chance which enveloped her in night, and lessened the weight of the encounter one half by depriving him of vision.

"Did you accomplish your object?" he asked.

"No," said she.

"How was that?"

"He has sailed."

"A very good thing for both, I say. I believe you would have married him if you could have overtaken him."

"That would I," she said fervently.

"Good God! What! Would you marry anybody or anything?" asked Louis, aghast.

"I would marry a tinker, for that matter," she said, recklessly. "Only I should prefer to drown myself"

Louis held his breath, and stood rigid, such was the force of the meaning her words conveyed.

"But Louis, you don't know all!" cried poor Viviette. "I am not so bad as you think! Mine has been folly, not vice. I thought I had married him—and then I found I had not—the marriage was invalid—Sir Blount was alive. And now Swithin has gone away, and will not come back for my calling. How can he! His fortune is left him on condition that he forms no legal tie. Oh, will he, will he come again!"

"Never, if that's the position of affairs," said Louis, firmly, after a pause.

"What then shall I do?" said Viviette.

Louis escaped the formidable difficulty of replying by pretending to continue his Havana, and she, bowed down to dust by what she had revealed, crept from him into the house. Louis's cigar went out in his hand, as he stood looking intently at the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LOUIS got up the next morning with an idea in his head. He had dressed for a journey, and breakfasted hastily.

Before he had started Viviette came down stairs. Louis, who was now greatly disturbed about her, went up to his sister and took her hand.

"*Aux grands maux les grands remedes*," he said, gravely. "I have a plan."

"I have a dozen," said she.

"You have?"

"Yes. But what are they worth? And yet there must, there must be a way!"

"Viviette," said Louis, "promise that you will wait till I come home to-night, before you do anything."

Her distracted eyes showed but slight comprehension of his request, as she said: "Yes."

An hour after that time Louis entered the train at Warborne, and was speedily crossing a country of

ragged woodland, which, although intruded on by the plow at places, remained largely intact from prehistoric times, and still abounded with yews of gigantic growth, and oaks tufted with mistletoe. It was the route to Melchester.

On setting foot in that city, he took the cathedral spire as his guide, the place being strange to him; and went on till he reached the archway dividing Melchester sacred from Melchester secular. Thence he threaded his course into the precincts of the damp and venerable Close, level as a bowling-green, and beloved of rooks, who, from their elm perches on high, threatened any unwary gazer with the mishap of Tobit. At the corner of this reposeful spot stood the episcopal palace.

Louis entered the gates, rang the bell, and looked around. Here the trees and rooks seemed older, if possible, than those in the Close behind him. Everything was dignified, and he felt himself like Punchinello in the king's chambers. Verily, in the present case, Glanville was not a man to stick at trifles any more than his illustrious prototype; and on the servant bringing a message that his lordship would see him at once, Louis marched boldly in.

Through an old corridor, roofed with old, dark beams, the servant led the way to the heavily molded door of the bishop's room. Dr. Helmsdale was there, and welcomed Louis with considerable stateliness. But his condescension was tempered with a curious anxiety, and even with nervousness.

He asked in pointed tones after the health of Lady Constantine; if Louis had brought an answer to the letter he had addressed to her a day or two earlier; and if the contents of the letter, or the previous one, were known to him.

"I have brought no answer from her," said Louis, "but the contents of your letter have been made known to me."

Since entering the building Louis had more than once felt some hesitation, and it might now, with a favoring manner from his entertainer, have operated

to deter him from going further with his intention. But the bishop had personal weaknesses that were fatal to sympathy for more than a moment.

"Then I may speak in confidence to you as her nearest relative," said his lordship, "and explain that I am now in a position with regard to Lady Constantine, which, in view of the important office I hold, I should not have cared to place myself in, unless I had felt quite sure of not being refused by her. And hence it is a great grief and some mortification to me that I was refused; owing, of course, to the fact that I unwittingly risked making my proposal at the very moment when she was under the influence of those strange tidings, and hence not able to judge what was best for her."

The bishop's words disclosed a mind whose sensitive fear of danger to its own dignity hindered it from criticism elsewhere. Things might have been worse for Louis' Puck-like idea of mismating his Hermia with this Demetrius.

Throwing a strong flavor of earnestness into his mien, he replied: "Your lordship, Viviette is my only sister; I am her only brother and friend. I am alarmed for her health and state of mind. Hence I have come to consult you on this very matter you have broached. I come absolutely without her knowledge, and I hope unconventionality may be excused in me on the score of my anxiety for her."

"Certainly. I trust that the prospect opened up by my proposal, combined with this other news, has not proved too much for her."

"My sister is distracted and distressed, Bishop Helmsdale. She wants comfort."

"Not distressed by my letter?" said the bishop, turning red. "Has it lowered me in her estimation?"

"On the contrary, while your disinterested offer was uppermost in her mind she was a different woman. It is this other matter that oppresses her. The result upon her of the recent discovery with regard to the late Sir Blount Constantine is peculiar. To say that he ill-used her in his life-time is to understate a truth.

He has been dead now a considerable period; but this revival of his memory operates as a sort of terror upon her. Images of the manner of Sir Blount's death are with her night and day, intensified by a hideous picture of the supposed scene, which was cruelly sent her. She dreads being alone. Nothing will restore my poor Viviette to her former cheerfulness but a distraction, a hope, a new prospect."

"That is precisely what acceptance of my offer would afford."

"Precisely," said Louis, with great respect. "But how to get her to avail herself of it, after once refusing you, is the difficulty, and my earnest problem!"

"Then we are quite at one!"

"We are. And it is to promote our wishes that I am come, since she will do nothing of herself."

"Then you can give me no hope of a reply to my second communication?"

"None whatever, by letter," said Louis. "Her impression, plainly, is that she cannot encourage your lordship. Yet, in the face of all this reticence, the secret is that she loves you warmly."

"Can you indeed assure me of that? Indeed—indeed!" said Bishop Helmsdale, musingly. "Then I must try to see her. I begin to feel—to feel strongly—that a course which would seem premature and unbecoming in other cases would be true and proper conduct in this. Her unhappy dilemma, her unwonted position, yes, yes, I see it all! I can afford to have some little misconstruction put upon my motives. I will go and see her immediately. Her past has been a cruel one; she wants sympathy, and with Heaven's help I'll give it."

"I think the remedy lies that way," said Louis, gently. "Some words came from her one night which seemed to show it. I was standing on the terrace; I heard somebody sigh in the dark, and found that it was she. I asked her what was the matter, and gently pressed her on this subject of boldly and promptly contracting a new marriage as a means of dispersing the horrors of the old. Her answer implied that she

would have no objection to do it, and to do it at once, provided she could remain externally passive in the matter; that she would tacitly yield, in fact, to pressure, but would not meet solicitation half-way. Now, Bishop Helmsdale, you see what has prompted me. On the one hand is a dignitary of high position and integrity, to say no more, who is anxious to save her from the gloom of her situation; on the other is this sister, who will not make known to you her willingness to be saved—partly from apathy, partly from a fear that she may be thought forward in responding favorably at so early a moment; partly, also, perhaps, from a modest sense that there would be some sacrifice on your part in allying yourself with a woman of her secluded and sad experience."

"Oh, there is no sacrifice! Quite otherwise. I care greatly for this alliance, Mr. Glanville. Your sister is very dear to me. Moreover, the advantages her mind would derive from the enlarged field of activity that the position of a bishop's wife would afford are palpable. I am induced to think that an early settlement of the question, an immediate coming to the point, which might be called too early in the majority of cases, would be a right and considerate tenderness here. My only dread is lest she should think an immediate following up of the subject premature. And the risk of a rebuff a second time is one which, as you must perceive, it would be highly unbecoming in me to run."

"I think the risk would be small, if your lordship would approach her frankly. Write she will not, I am assured; and having her interest at heart, it was that which induced me to come to you, and make this candid statement in reply to your communication. Her late husband having been virtually dead these four or five years, believed dead two years, and actually dead nearly one, no reproach could attach to her if she were to contract another union to-morrow."

"I agree with you, Mr. Glanville," said the bishop, warmly. "I will think this over. Her motive in not replying I can quite understand; your motive in com-

ing I can also understand and appreciate in a brother. If I feel convinced that it would be a seemly and expedient thing, I will come to Welland to-morrow."

The point to which Louis had brought the bishop being so satisfactory, he feared to endanger it by another word. The interview having ended as far as its object was concerned, he went away almost hurriedly, and at once left the precincts of the cathedral, lest another encounter with Bishop Helmsdale should lead the latter to take a new and slower view of his duties as Viviette's suitor.

He reached Welland by dinner-time, and came upon Viviette in the same pensive mood in which he had left her. It seemed that she had hardly moved since.

"Have you discovered Swithin St. Cleeve's address?" she said, without looking up at him.

"No," said Louis.

Then she broke out with indescribable anguish: "But you asked me to wait till this evening; and I have waited through the long day in the belief that your words meant something, and that you would bring good tidings! And now I find your words meant nothing, and you have *not* brought good tidings!"

Louis could not decide for a moment what to say to this. Should he venture to give her thoughts a new course by a revelation of his design? No; it would be better to prolong her despair yet another night, and spring relief upon her suddenly, that she might jump at it, and commit herself without an interval in reflection on certain aspects of the proceeding.

Nothing, accordingly, did he say, and, conjecturing that she would be hardly likely to take any desperate step that night, he left her to herself.

His anxiety at this crisis began to be great. Everything depended on the result of the bishop's self-communion. Would he, or would he not, come the next day? Perhaps instead of his important presence there would appear a letter postponing the visit indefinitely; if so, all would be lost. The bishop was as abjectly

in love as only pompous people can be, and this thought gave him hope.

Louis's suspense kept him awake, and he was not alone in his sleeplessness. Through the night he heard his sister walking up and down, in a state which betokened that for every pang of grief she had disclosed twice as many had remained unspoken. He almost feared that she might seek to end her existence by violence, so unreasonably sudden were her moods; and he lay and longed for the day.

It was morning. She came down the same as usual, and asked if there had arrived any telegram or letter, but there was neither. Louis avoided her, knowing that nothing he could say just then would do her any good. No communication had reached him from the bishop, and that looked well. By one ruse and another, as the day went on, he led her away from contemplating the remote possibility of hearing from Swithin, and led her to look at the worst contingency as her probable fate. It seemed as if she really made up her mind to this, for by the afternoon she was apathetic, like a woman who neither hoped nor feared.

And then a fly drove up to the door.

Louis, who had been standing in the hall the greater part of that day, glanced out through a private window, and went to Viviette. "The bishop has called," he said. "Be ready to see him."

"The Bishop of Melchester?" said Viviette, bewildered.

"Yes. I asked him to come. He comes for an answer to his letters."

"An answer—to—his—letters?" she murmured.

"An immediate reply of yes or no."

Her face showed the workings of her mind. How entirely an answer of assent, at once acted on for better or for worse, would clear the specter from her path, there needed no tongue to tell. It would, moreover, accomplish that end without involving the impoverishment of Swithin, the inevitable result if she had adopted the legitimate road out of her trouble. Hitherto there had seemed to her dismayed mind, un-

enlightened as to any course save one of honesty, no achievement of *both* her desires—the saving of Swithin and the saving of herself. But behold, here is a way! A tempter had shown it to her. It involved a great wrong, which to her had quite obscured its feasibility. But she perceived now that it was indeed a way. Nature was forcing her hand at the game; and to what will not nature compel her weaker victims in extremes?

Louis left her to think it out. When he reached the drawing-room Dr. Helmsdale was standing there, with the air of a man too good for his errand—which was, indeed, not far from the truth.

"Have you broken my message to her?" asked the bishop, sonorously.

"Not your message; your visit," said Louis. "I leave the rest to your lordship's hands. I have done all I can for her."

Viviette was in her own small room to-day. Feeling that it must be a bold stroke or none, Louis led the bishop across the hall till they reached the apartment, opened the door, and, instead of following, shut it behind him.

Then Glanville passed an anxious time. He walked from the foot of the staircase to the star of old swords and pikes on the wall; from these to the stags' horns; thence down the corridor as far as the door, where he could hear murmuring inside, but not its import. The longer they remained closeted, the more excited did he become. That she had not peremptorily negatived the proposal at the outset was a strong sign of its success. It showed that she had admitted argument; and the worthy bishop had a pleader on his side whom he little knew of. The very weather seemed to favor Dr. Helmsdale in his suit. A blusterous wind had blown from the west, howling in the smokeless chimneys, and suggesting to the feminine mind storms at sea, a tossing ocean, and the hopeless inaccessibility of all astronomers and men on the other side of the same. The bishop entered Viviette's room at ten minutes past three. The long hand of the clock lay

level at forty-five minutes past when the door moved, and he came out. Louis met him where the passage joined the hall. Dr. Helmsdale was decidedly in an emotional state, his face being slightly flushed. Louis looked his anxious inquiry without speaking it.

"She accepts me," said the bishop, in a low voice. "And the wedding is to be soon. Her long solitude and sufferings justify haste. What you said was true. Sheer weariness and distraction had driven her to me. She was quite passive at last, and agreed to anything I proposed—such is the persuasive force of a trained mind! A good and wise woman, she perceived what a true shelter from sadness was offered, and was not the one to despise Heaven's gift."

CHAPTER XL.

THE silence of Swithin was to be accounted for by the circumstance that neither to Marseilles nor to America had he, in the first place, directed his steps. Feeling himself absolutely free, he had, upon arriving at Southampton, decided to make haste to the Cape. His object was to leave his heavier luggage there, examine the capabilities of the spot for his purpose, find out the necessity or otherwise of shipping over his own equatorial, and then cross to America as soon as there was a good opportunity. Here he might inquire the movements of the transit expedition to the South Pacific, and join it at such a point as might be convenient.

Thus, though wrong in her premises, Viviette had intuitively decided with absolute precision. There was, as a matter of fact, no chance of her being able to communicate with him for several months, notwithstanding that he might possibly communicate with her.

This excursive time was an awakening for Swithin. To altered circumstances inevitably followed altered views. That such changes should have a marked

effect upon a young man who had made neither grand tour nor petty one,—who had, in short, scarcely been away from home in his life,—was nothing more than natural. New ideas struggled to disclose themselves; and with the addition of strange twinklers to his southern horizon came an absorbed attention that way, and a corresponding forgetfulness of what lay to the north, behind his back, whether human or celestial. Whoever may deplore it, few will wonder that Viviette, who till then had stood high in his heaven, if she had not dominated it, sank lower and lower, like the North Star. Master of a large advance of his first year's income in circular notes and other forms, he perhaps too readily forgot that the mere act of honor, but for her self-suppression, would have rendered him penniless.

Meanwhile, to come back and claim her at the specified time, four years thence, if she did not object to be claimed, was as much a part of his programme as were the exploits abroad and elsewhere that were to prelude it. The very thoroughness of his intention for that advanced date inclined him all the more to shelve the subject now. Her unhappy caution to him not to write too soon was a comfortable license in his present state of tensity about sublime scientific things, which knew not woman, nor her sacrifices, nor her fears. In truth, he was not only too young in years, but too literal, direct, and uncompromising in nature, to understand such a woman as Lady Constantine; and she suffered for that limitation in him, as was antecedently probable she would do.

He staid but a little time at Cape Town, on this first, reconnoitering journey, and on that account wrote to no one from there. On leaving, he found there remained some weeks on his hands before he wished to cross to America, and feeling an irrepressible desire for further studies in navigation under clear skies, he took the steamer for Melbourne; returning thence in due time, and pursuing his journey to America, where he landed at Boston. Having at least had enough of great circles and other nautical

reckonings, and taking no interest in men or cities, this indefatigable scrutineer of the universe went immediately to Cambridge ; and there, by the help of an introduction he had brought from England, he reveled for a time in the glories of the gigantic refractor (which he was permitted to use on odd occasions), and in the pleasures of intercourse with the scientific group around. This brought him on to the time of starting with the transit expedition, when he and his kind became lost to the eye of civilization behind the horizon of the Pacific Ocean.

To speak of their doings on this pilgrimage, of ingress and egress, of tangent and parallax, of external and internal contact, would avail nothing. Is it not all written in the chronicles of the Astronomical Society? More to the point will it be to mention that poor Viviette's telegram and letter to Cambridge had been returned long before Swithin reached that place, while her missives to Marseilles were of course misdirected altogether. On arriving in America, uncertain of an address in that country to which he would return, Swithin wrote his first letter to his grandmother; and in this he directed that all communications should be sent to await him at Cape Town, as the only safe spot for finding him sooner or later. The equatorial he also directed to be forwarded to the same place. At this time, too, he ventured to break Viviette's commands, and address a letter to her, not knowing of the strange results that had followed his absence from home.

It was February. The transit was over ; the scientific company had broken up ; and Swithin had steamed towards the Cape, to take up his permanent abode there, with a view to his great task of surveying, charting, and theorizing on those exceptional features in the southern skies which had been inadequately treated by the younger Herschel. Having entered Table Bay, and landed on the quay, he called at once at the post-office.

Two letters were handed him, and he found from the date that they had been waiting there for some

time. One of these epistles, which had a weather-worn look as regarded the ink, and was in old-fashioned penmanship, he knew to be from his grandmother, and opened it before he had as much as glanced at the superscription of the second.

Besides immaterial portions, it contained the following :—

"I reckon you know by now of our main news this fall, but lest you should not have heard of it I send the exact thing snipped out of the newspaper. Nobody expected her to do it quite so soon ; but it is said hereabout that my lord bishop and my lady had been drawing nigh to an understanding before the glum tidings of Sir Blount's taking of his own life reached her ; and the account of the wicked deed was so sore afflicting to her mind, and made her poor heart so timid and low, that in charity to her her few friends agreed on urging her to let the bishop go on paying his court as before, notwithstanding she had not been a widow-woman near so long as was thought. This, as it turned out, she was willing to do ; and when my lord asked her she told him she would marry him at once or never. That's as I was told, and I had it from those that know."

The cutting from the newspaper was an ordinary anouncement of marriage between the Bishop of Melchester and Lady Constantine.

Swithin was so astounded at the intelligence of what for the nonce seemed Viviette's wanton fickleness, that he quite omitted to look at the second letter, and remembered nothing about it till an hour afterwards, when sitting in his room at the hotel.

It was in her handwriting, but so altered that its superscription had not arrested his eye. It had no beginning, or date ; but its contents soon acquainted him with her motive for the precipitate act. The few concluding sentences are all that it will be necessary to quote here :

"There was no way out of it, even if I could have

found you, without infringing one of the conditions I had previously laid down. The long desire of my heart has been not to impoverish you or mar your career. The new desire was to save myself and another. . . . I have done a desperate thing. Yet for myself I could do no better, and for you no less. I would have sacrificed my single self to honesty; but I was not alone concerned. What woman has a right to blight a coming life to preserve her personal soul? . . . The one bright spot is that it saves you and your endowment from further catastrophes, and preserves you to the pleasant paths of scientific fame. I no longer lie like a log across your path, which is now as open as on the day before you saw me, and ere I encouraged you to win me. Alas, Swithin, I ought to have known better! The folly was great, and the suffering be upon my head! I have borne much, and am not unprepared. As for you, Swithin, by simply pressing straight on, your triumph is assured. Do not communicate with me in any way—not even in answer to this. Do not think of me. Do not see me ever any more.

"Your unhappy

"VIVIETTE."

Swithin's heart swelled within him in sudden pity for her, first; then he blanched with a horrid sense of what she had done, and at his own relations to the deed. He felt like an awakened somnambulist, who should find that he had been accessory to a tragedy during a period of unconsciousness. She had loosened the knot of her difficulties by cutting it unscrupulously through and through.

The big tidings rather dazed than crushed him, his predominant feeling being soon again one of keenest sorrow and sympathy. Yet one thing was obvious; he could do nothing—absolutely nothing. The event which he now heard of for the first time had taken place five long months ago. He reflected, and regretted, and mechanically went on with his preparations for settling down to work under the shadow of Table

Mountain. He was as one who suddenly finds the world a stranger place than he thought ; but is excluded by age, temperament, and situation from being much more than an astonished spectator of its strangeness.

The Royal Observatory was about a mile out of the town, and hither he repaired as soon as he had established himself in lodgings. He had decided, on his first visit to the Cape, that it would be highly advantageous to him if he could supplement the occasional use of the large instruments here by the use at his own house of his own equatorial, and had accordingly given directions that it might be sent over from England. The precious possession now arrived ; and, although the sight of it—of the brasses on which her hand had often rested, of the eye-piece through which her dark eye had beamed—engendered some decidedly bitter regrets in him for a time, he could not long afford to give to the past the days that were meant for the future.

Unable to get a room convenient for a private observatory, he resolved at last to fix the instrument on a solid pillar in the garden ; and several days were spent in accommodating it to its new position. In this latitude there was no necessity for economizing clear nights, as he had been obliged to do on the old tower at Welland. There it had happened more than once, to his sorrow, that, after he had waited idle through days and nights of cloudy weather, poor Viviette would fix her time for meeting him at an hour when at last he had an opportunity of seeing the sky ; so that in giving to her the golden moments of cloudlessness he was losing his chance with the orbs above. But here there was clear atmosphere enough for both science and love, had an object for the latter been present with him.

Those features which usually attract the eye of the visitor to a new latitude are the novel forms of human and vegetable life, and other such sublunary things. But our young man glanced slightingly at these ; the

changes overhead had his attention. The old subject was imprinted there, but in new type. Here was a heaven fixed and ancient as the northern; yet it had never appeared above the Welland hills since they were heaved up from beneath. Here was an unalterable circumpolar region; but the polar patterns, stereotyped in history and legend, without which it had almost seemed that a polar sky could not exist, had never been seen therein.

St. Cleeve, as was natural, began by cursory surveys, which were not likely to be of much utility to the world or to himself. He wasted several weeks—indeed, above two months—in a comparatively idle survey of southern novelties; in the mere luxury of looking at stellar objects whose wonders were known, recounted, and classified long before his own personality had been heard of. With a child's simple delight, he allowed his instrument to rove evening after evening from the gorgeous glitter of Canopus to the hazy clouds of Magellan. Before he had well finished this optical prelude there floated over to him from the other side of the equator the postscript to the epistle of his poor Viviette. It came in the vehicle of a common newspaper, under the head of "Births:"

"April 10, 18—, at the Palace, Melchester, Lady Helmsdale, of a son."

CHAPTER XLI.

THREE years passed away, and Swithin still remained at the Cape, quietly pursuing the work that had brought him there. His memoranda of observations had accumulated to a wheelbarrow load, and he was beginning to shape them into a work of scientific utility.

He had gauged the southern skies with greater results than even he himself had anticipated. Those

unfamiliar constellations which, to the casual beholder, are at most a new arrangement of ordinary points of light, were, to this professed astronomer, as to his brethren, a far greater matter. It was below the surface that his material lay. There, in regions revealed only to the instrumental observer, were suns of hybrid kind, fire fogs, floating world pollen, globes that flew in groups, like swarms of bees, and other extraordinary sights, which, when decomposed by Swithin's equatorial, turned out to be the beginning of a new series of phenomena, instead of the end of an old one.

There were gloomy deserts in those southern skies, such as the north show scarcely an example of ; sites, set apart for the positions of suns, which for some unfathomable reason were left uncreated, their places remaining conspicuous by their emptiness.

The inspection of these chasms brought him a second pulsation of that old horror which he had used to describe to Viviette as produced in him by bottomlessness in the north heaven. The ghostly finger of limitless vacancy touched him now on the other side. Infinite deeps in the north stellar region had had a homely familiarity about them when compared with infinite deeps in the region of the south pole. This was an even more unknown tract of the unknown ; space here, being less the historic haunt of human thought than overhead at home, seemed pervaded with a more lonely loneliness.

Were there given on paper to these astronomical exercitations of St. Cleeve a space proportionable to that occupied by his year with Viviette at Welland, this narrative would treble its length ; but not a single additional glimpse would be afforded of Swithin in his relations with old emotions. In these experiments with convex glasses, important as they were to ear and intellect, there was little food for the sympathetic instincts which create the changes in a life, and therefore are more particularly the question here. That which is the foreground and measuring base of one perspective draught may be the vanishing-point of an-

other perspective draught, while yet they are both draughts of the same thing. Swithin's doings and discoveries in the southern sidereal system were, no doubt, incidents of the highest importance to him; and yet, from our present point of view, they served but the humble purpose of *killing time*, while other points, more nearly allied to his heart than to his understanding, developed themselves at home.

In the intervals between his professional occupations he took walks over the sand-flats near, or among the farms which were gradually overspreading the moors in the vicinity of Cape Town. He grew familiar with the outline of Table-Mountain, and the fleecy "Devil's Table-Cloth," which used to settle on the top when the wind was south-east. On these promenades he would more particularly think of Viviette, and of that curious pathetic chapter in his life with her, which seemed to have wound itself up and ended forever. Those scenes were rapidly receding into distance, and the intensity of his sentiment regarding them had proportionately abated. He felt that there had been something wrong in that period of his existence, and yet he could not exactly define the boundary of the wrong. Viviette's sad and amazing sequel to that chapter had still a fearful, catastrophic aspect in his eyes; but instead of musing over it and its bearings, he shunned the subject, as we shun by night the shady scene of a tragedy, and keep to the open road.

He sometimes contemplated her apart from the past, —leading her life in the cathedral close at Melchester; and wondered how often she looked south and thought of where he was.

On one of these afternoon walks in the neighborhood of the Royal Observatory, he turned and looked towards the signal-post on the Lion's Rump. This was a high promontory to the northwest of Table Mountain, which overlooked Table Bay. Before his eyes had left the scene the signal was suddenly hoisted on the staff. This announced that a mail steamer had appeared in view over the sea. He retraced his steps, as he had often done on such occasions, and strolled

leisurely across the intervening mile and a half, till he arrived at the post-office door.

There was no letter from England for him; but there was a newspaper, addressed in the seventeenth-century handwriting of his grandmother, who, in spite of her great age, still retained a steady hold on life. He turned away disappointed, and resumed his walk into the country, opening the paper as he went along.

A cross in black ink attracted his attention; and it was opposite a name among the deaths. His blood ran icily as he discerned the word "Helmsdale." But it was not she. Her husband, the Bishop of Melchester, had, after a short illness, departed this life at the comparatively early age of fifty years.

All the enactments of the bygone days at Welland now started up like an awakened army from the ground. Only a few months were wanting to the time when he would be of an age to marry without sacrificing the annuity which formed his means of subsistence. It was a point in his life that had had no meaning or interest for him since his separation from Viviette, for women were now no more to him than the inhabitants of Jupiter. However, the whirligig of time having again set Viviette free, the aspect of home altered, and conjecture as to her future found room to work anew.

But beyond the simple fact that she was a widow, he for some time gained not an atom of intelligence concerning her. There was no one of whom he could inquire but his grandmother, and she could tell him nothing about a lady who dwelt far away at Melchester.

Several months slipped by thus; and no feeling within him rose to sufficient strength to force him out of a passive attitude.

Then by the merest chance, his granny stated, in one of her rambling epistles, that Lady Helmsdale was coming to live again at Welland, in the old house, with her child, now a little boy between three and four years of age.

Swithin, however, lived on as before.

By the following autumn a change became necesary for the young man himself. His work at the Cape was done. His uncle's wishes that he should study there had been more than observed. The materials for his great treatise were collected, and it now only remained for him to arrange, digest, and publish them, for which purpose a return to England was indispensable.

So the equatorial was unscrewed and the stand taken down; the astronomer's barrow-load of precious memoranda, and rolls upon rolls of diagrams, representing three years of continuous labor, were safely packed; and Swithin departed for good and all from the shores of Cape Town.

He had long before informed his grandmother of the date at which she might expect him, and in a reply from her, which reached him just previous to sailing, she casually mentioned that she frequently saw Lady Helmsdale; that on the last occasion her ladyship had shown great interest in the information that Swithin was coming home, and had inquired the time of his return.

On a late summer day Swithin stepped from the train at Warborne, and, directing his baggage to be sent on after him, set out on foot for old Welland once again.

It seemed but the day after his departure, so little had the scene changed. True, there was that change which is always the first to arrest attention in places that are conventionally called unchanging—a higher and broader vegetation at every familiar corner than at the former time.

He had not gone a mile when he saw walking before him a clergyman, whose form, after consideration, he recognized, in spite of a novel whiteness in that part of his hair that showed below the brim of his hat. Swithin walked much faster than this gentleman, and soon was at his side.

"Mr. Torkingham—I knew it was!" said Swithin.

Mr. Torkingham was slower in recognizing the as-

tronomer, but in a moment had greeted him with a warm shake of the hand.

"I have been to the station on purpose to meet you!" cried Mr. Torkingham; "and was returning with the idea that you had not come. I am your grandmother's emissary. She could not come herself, and as she was anxious, and nobody else could be spared, I came for her."

Then they walked on together. The parson told Swithin all about his grandmother, the parish, and his endeavors to enlighten it; and in due course: "You are no doubt aware that Lady Helmsdale — the Lady Constantine of former days—is living again at Welland."

Swithin said he had heard as much, and added, what was perfectly true, that the news of the bishop's death had been a great surprise to him.

"Yes," said Mr. Torkingham, with nine thoughts to one word; "one might have prophesied, to look at him, that Melchester would not lack a bishop for the next forty years. Yes; pale death knocks at the cottages of the poor and the palaces of kings with an impartial foot."

"Was he a—particularly good man?" asked Swithin.

"He was not a Ken, or a Heber. To speak candidly, he had his faults, of which arrogance was not the least. But who is perfect?"

Swithin, somehow, felt relieved to hear that the bishop was not a perfect man.

"His poor wife, I fear, had not a great deal more happiness with him than with her first husband. But one might almost have foreseen it; the marriage was hasty—the result of a red-hot caprice, hardly becoming to a man in his position; and it betokened a want of temperate discretion which soon showed itself in other ways. That's all there was to be said against him; and now it's all over, and things have settled again into their old course. But Lady Helmsdale is not Lady Constantine. No; put it as you will, she is not the same. There seems to be a nameless something on her mind, a trouble, a rooted melancholy,

which no man's ministry can reach. Formerly she was a woman whose confidence it was easy to gain; but neither religion nor philosophy avails with her now. Beyond that, her life is strangely like what it was when you were with us."

Conversing thus they pursued the turnpike road, till their conversation was interrupted by a crying voice on their left. They looked, and perceived that a child, in getting over an adjoining stile, had fallen on his face.

Mr. Torkingham and Swithin both hastened up to help the sufferer, who was a lovely little fellow with flaxen hair, which spread out in a frill of curls from beneath a quaint, close-fitting velvet cap that he wore. Swithin picked him up, while Mr. Torkingham wiped the sand from his lips and nose, and administered a few words of consolation, together with a few sweetmeats, which, somewhat to Swithin's surprise, the parson produced as if by magic from his pocket. One half the comfort rendered would have sufficed to soothe such a disposition as the child's; he ceased crying, and ran away in delight to his unconscious nurse, who was reaching up for blackberries at a hedge some way off.

"You know who he is, of course?" said Mr. Torkingham, as they resumed their journey.

"No," said Swithin.

"Oh, I thought you did. Yet how should you? It is Lady Helmsdale's boy, her only child. His fond mother little thinks he is so far away from home."

"Dear me—Lady Helmsdale's—ah—how interesting!" Swithin paused abstractedly for a moment; then stepped back again to the stile, where he stood watching the little boy out of sight.

"I can never venture out-of-doors now without sweets in my pocket," continued the good-natured vicar; "and the result is that I meet that young man more frequently than any other of my parishioners."

St. Cleeve was silent, and they turned into Welland Lane, where their paths presently diverged, and Swithin was left to pursue his way alone. He might have

accompanied the vicar yet further, and gone straight to Welland House; but it would have been difficult to do so then without provoking inquiry. It was easy to go there now; by a cross-path he could be at the mansion almost as soon as by the direct road. And yet Swithin did not turn; he felt an indescribable reluctance to see Viviette. He could not exactly say why. Moreover, before he knew how the land lay, it might be awkward to attempt to call; and this was a sufficient excuse for postponement.

In this mood he went on, following the direct way to his grandmother's homestead. He reached the garden gate, and, looking into the bosky basin in which the old house stood, saw a graceful female form moving before the porch, bidding adieu to some one within the door.

He wondered what creature of that mold his grandmother could know, and went forward with some hesitation. At his approach the apparition turned, and he beheld, developed into blushing womanhood, one who had once been known to him as the village maiden, Tabitha Lark. Seeing Swithin, and apparently from an instinct that her presence would not be desirable just then, she moved quickly round into the garden.

The returned astronomer entered the house, where he found awaiting him poor old Mrs. Martin, to whose earthly course death stood rather as the asymptote than as the end. She was perceptibly smaller in form than when he had left her, and she could see less distinctly. A rather affecting greeting followed, in which his grandmother murmured the words of Israel: "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

The form of Hannah had disappeared from the kitchen, that ancient servant having been gathered to her fathers about six months before, her place being filled by a young girl, who knew not Joseph.

They presently chatted with much cheerfulness, and his grandmother said: "Have you heard what a wonderful young woman Miss Lark has become?—a

mere fleet-footed, slittering maid when you were last home."

St. Cleeve had not heard, but he had partly seen, and he was informed that Tabitha had left Welland shortly after his own departure, and had studied music with great success in London, where she had resided ever since till quite recently; that she played at concerts, at oratorios; that she had, in short, joined the phalanx of wonderful women who have sternly resolved to eclipse masculine genius altogether, and humiliate the brutal sex to the dust.

"She is only in the garden," added his grandmother. "Why don't ye go out and speak to her?"

Swithin was nothing loth, and strolled out under the apple-trees, where he arrived just in time to prevent Miss Lark from going off by the back gate. There was not much difficulty in breaking ice between them, and they began to chat with vivacity.

Now all these proceedings occupied time, for somehow it was very charming to talk to Miss Lark; and by degrees St. Cleeve told Tabitha of his great undertaking, and of the voluminous notes he had amassed which would require so much rearrangement and recopying by an amanuensis as to absolutely appall him. He greatly feared he should not get one careful enough for such scientiffic matter—whereupon Tabitha said she would be delighted to do it for him. Then, blushing, and declaring suddenly that it had grown quite late, she left him and the garden for her relation's house hard by.

Swithin, no less than Tabitha, had been surprised by the disappearance of the sun behind the hill; and the question now arose whether it would be advisable to call upon Viviette that night. There was little doubt that she knew of his coming, but more than that he could not predicate; and being entirely ignorant of whom she had around her, entirely in the dark as to her present feelings towards him, he thought it would be better to defer his visit until the next day.

Walking round the front of the house, he beheld the well-known agriculturists, Hezzy Biles, Haymoss Fry,

and some others of the same old school, passing the garden gate homeward from their work, and bundles of wood upon their backs. Swithin saluted them over the top-rail.

"Well! do my eyes and ears"—began Hezzy; and then, with a smile almost as wide as the gate, balancing his fagot on end against the hedge, he came forward, the others following.

"Says I to myself, as soon as I heerd his voice," Hezzy continued (addressing Swithin as if he were a disinterested spectator, and not to himself), "please God I'll pitch my nitch, and go across and speak to en."

"I knowed in a winking 'twas some great navigator that I see a standing there," said Haymoss. "But whe'r 'twere a sort of nabob, or a diment-digger, or a lion-hunter, I couldn't so much as guess till I heerd en spak."

"And what changes have come over Welland since I was last at home?" asked Swithin.

"Well, Mr. San Cleeve," Hezzy replied, "when you've said that a few stripling boys and maidens have busted into blooth, and a few married women have plimmed and chimped (my lady among 'em), why, you've said anighst all, Mr. San Cleeve."

The conversation thus begun was continued on divers matters, till they were all enveloped in total darkness, when his old acquaintances shouldered their fagots again and proceeded on their way.

Now that he was actually within her coasts again, Swithin felt a little more strongly the influence of the past and Viviette than he had been accustomed to do for the last two or three years. During the night he felt half sorry that he had not marched off to the great house to see her, regardless of the time of day. If she really nourished for him any particle of her affection, it had been the cruellest thing not to call. A few questions that he had put concerning her to his grandmother elicited that Lady Helmsdale had no friends about her, not even her brother, and that her health had not been so good since her return from Melchester

as formerly. Still, this proved nothing as to the state of her heart; and as she had kept a dead silence since the bishop's death, it was quite posssible that she would meet him with that cold, repressive tone and manner which experienced women know so well how to put on when they wish to intimate to the long-lost lover that old episodes are to be taken as forgotten.

The next morning he prepared to call, if only on the ground of old acquaintance; for Swithin was too straightforward to do anything indirectly. It was rather too early for this purpose when he went out from his grandmother's garden gate, after breakfast, and waited in the garden. While he lingered his eye fell on the Rings-Hill Speer. It appeared dark for a moment, against the blue sky behind it; then the fleeting cloud which shadowed it passed on, and the face of the column brightened into such luminousness that the sky behind sunk to the complexion of a dark foil.

"Surely somebody is on the column," he said to himself, after gazing at it for a while.

Instead of going straight to the great house he deviated through the insulating field, now sown to turnips, which surrounded the plantation on Rings-Hill. By the time that he plunged under the trees he was still more certain that somebody was on the tower. He crept up to the base with proprietary curiosity, for the spot seemed again like his own.

The path still remained much as formerly, but the nook in which the cabin had stood was covered with undergrowth. Swithin entered the door of the tower, ascended the staircase about half-way on tip-toe, and listened for he did not wish to intrude on the top, if any stranger were there. The hollow spiral, as he knew from old experience, would bring down to his ears the slightest sound from above; and it now revealed to him the words of a dialogue in progress at the summit of the tower.

"Mother, what shall I do?" a child's voice said. "Shall I sing?"

The mother seemed to assent, for the child began:

"The robin has fled from the wood
To the snug habitation of man."

This performance apparently attracted but little attention from the child's companion, for the young voice suggested, as a new form of entertainment: 'Shall I say my prayers?"

"Yes," replied one whom Swithin had begun to recognize.

"Who shall I pray for?"

No answer.

"Who shall pray for?"

"Pray for father."

"But he is gone to Heaven."

A sigh from Viviette was distinctly audible.

"You made a mistake, didn't you?" continued the little one.

"I must have—the strangest mistake a woman ever made!"

Nothing more was said, and Swithin ascended, words from above indicating that his footsteps were heard. In another half minute he rose through the hatchway. A lady in black was sitting in the sun, and the boy with the golden hair whom he had seen yesterday was at her feet.

"Viviette!" he said,

"Swithin!—at last!" she cried.

The words died upon her lips, and from very faintness she bent her head. For instead of rushing forward to her he stood still; and there appeared upon his face a look which there was no mistaking.

Yes; he was shocked at her worn and faded aspect. The image which he had mentally carried out with him to the Cape he had brought home again as that of the woman he was now to rejoin. But another woman sat before him, and not the orginal Viviette. Her cheeks had lost for ever that firm contour which had been drawn by the vigorous hand of youth, and the masses of hair that were once darkness visible had become touched here and there by a faint gray haze, like the Via Lactea in a midnight sky.

Yet to those who had eyes to understand, as well as to see, the chastened sweetness of her once handsome features revealed more promising material beneath than ever her youth had done. But Swithin was hopelessly her junior. Unhappily for her, he had now just arrived at an age whose canon of faith it is that the silly period of woman's life is her only period of beauty. Viviette saw it all, and knew that time had at last brought about his revenge. She had tremblingly watched and waited, without sleep, ever since Swithin had re-entered Welland; and it was for this.

Swithin came forward, and took her by the hand, which she passively allowed him to do.

"Swithin, you don't love me," she said, simply.

"Oh, Viviette!"

"You don't love me," she repeated.

"Don't say it!"

"Yes, but I will! You have a right not to love me. You did once. But now I am an old woman, and you are still a young man; so how can you love me? I do not expect it. It is kind and charitable of you to come and see me here."

"I have come all the way from the Cape," he faltered; for her insistence took all power out of him to deny, in mere politeness, what she said.

"Yes, you have come from the Cape; but not for me," she answered. "It would be absurd if you had come for me. You have come because your work there is finished. . . . . I like to sit here with my little boy; it is a pleasant spot. It was once something to us, was it not? But that was long ago. You scarcely knew me for the same woman, did you?"

"Knew you? Yes, of course I knew you!"

"You looked as if you did not. But you must not be surprised at me. I belong to an earlier generation than you remember."

Thus, in sheer bitterness of spirit did she inflict wounds on herself by exaggerating the difference in their years. But she had, nevertheless, spoken truly. Sympathize with her as he might, and as he un-

questionably did, he loved her no longer. But why had she expected otherwise? O woman, might a prophet have said to her, great is thy faith if thou believest a junior lover's love will last five years?

"I shall be glad to know through your grandmother how you are getting on," she said, meekly. "But now—I would much rather that we part. Yes; do not question me. I would rather that we part. Good-by!"

Hardly knowing what he did, he touched her hand, and obeyed. He was a scientist, and took words literally. There is something in the inexorably simple logic of such men which partakes of the cruelty of the natural laws that are their study. He entered the tower and mechanically descended the steps; and it was not till he got half-way down that he thought she could not mean what she had said.

Before leaving Cape Town he had made up his mind on this one point: that if she were willing to marry him, marry her he would, without let or hindrance. That much he morally owed her, and he was not the man to demur. And though the Swithin who had returned was not quite the Swithin who had gone away, though he could not now love her with the sort of love he had once bestowed, he believed that all her conduct had been dictated by the purest benevolence to him; by that charity which "seeketh not her own." Hence he did not flinch from a wish to deal with loving kindness towards her,—a sentiment, perhaps, in the long run, more to be prized than lover's love.

Her manner had caught him unawares; but now, recovering himself, he turned back determinedly. Bursting out upon the roof, he clasped her in his arms, and kissed her several times.

"Viviette, Viviette," he said, "I have come to marry you!"

She uttered a shriek,—a shriek of amazed joy,—such as never was heard on that tower before or since, and fell in his arms, clasping his neck.

There she lay heavily. Not to disturb her he sat

down in her seat, still holding her fast. The little boy, who had stood with round conjectural eyes throughout the meeting, now came close ; and presently, looking up to Swithin, said: "Mother has gone to sleep."

Swithin looked down and started. Her tight clasp loosened. A wave of whiteness, like that of marble which has never seen the sun, crept up from her neck, and traveled upwards and onwards over her cheek, lips, eyelids, forehead, temples ; its margin banishing back the live pink till the latter had entirely disappeared.

The little boy began to cry, but in his concentration Swithin hardly heard it. "Viviette, Viviette !" he said.

The child cried with still deeper grief, and pushed his hand into Swithin's for protection. "Hush, hush, my child !" said Swithin, distractedly. "I'll take care of you. Oh, Viviette !" he exclaimed again, pressing her face to his. But she did not reply. "What can this be ?" he asked himself. He would not then answer according to his fear.

But he had to do so soon. Sudden joy after despair had touched an overstrained heart too smartly. Viviette was dead. The bishop was avenged.

[THE END.]

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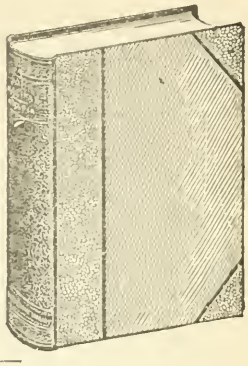

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